

MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE



MARCH 1985

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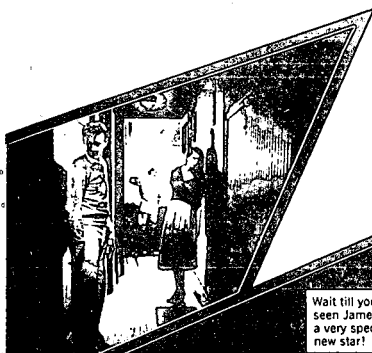
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DEADLY VISIONS

by Brett Halliday

The man had visions—of people being brutally murdered—and the visions came true. If that wasn't bad enough, the worst storm in Miami history was striking with hurricane force. Mike Shayne was going to be one busy private eye! 4

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*He had strange dreams of people being murdered—and the
dreams kept coming true!*

Deadly Visions

by **BRETT HALLIDAY**

THE JANUARY MOON HUNG OVER MIAMI BEACH LIKE A dull ball someone had forgotten to remove from the Christmas tree. A powerful wind from the south prowled down Collins Avenue. A figure in checked pants and a striped shirt leaned against the royal palm for support in the unusually strong gusts. He looked like a typical elderly tourist who had paused to catch his breath. It was so much breezier than he had thought, and for a moment he wished he had brought a coat. No, he decided, most of his jackets were too common, too old, and wouldn't fit the role he was playing tonight. In his hand was a copy of the *Miami Daily News* that he might have bought a few minutes earlier at a nearby rack.

He hadn't. The newspaper was weeks old, and the shiny blade that lay concealed in its folds was much older than that.

FORECASTER GENE RAWLINGS SAT MESMERIZED BY THE state-of-the-art color radar in front of him. For years he had requested that his superior at the National Hurricane Center give him the night shift. It was usually quite peaceful and lacked the two things he hated the most—bad weather and supervisors.

Tonight it looked like he was going to get both. He had hoped to be able to spend most of the evening undisturbed, figuring out his latest move. In what was supposed to be a repeat of the Battle of Chancellorsville, General Hooker already had outflanked Jackson's and Stuart's men. If he couldn't come up with some brilliant strategy and get it in the morning mail, Chancellorsville and the six-month-old wargame were lost. Instead of concentrating on the battles he had been fighting since his father had bought him his first Britains miniature figure, he had been obligated to follow the progress of Tropical Storm Adam, the first of the year.

Rawlings lit up a cigarette and tapped the vital information into the computer banks. Spawned from a tropical depression that had formed the day before in the southeastern Bahamas, Adam had stalled near latitude 25.0 north and longitude 78.0 west. He checked the time, 8:00 P.M., and noted the distance. 160 miles east-southeast of Miami. Windspeed in the low 50's. Gale warnings were already posted from Key West to Cape Canaveral. Heavy rains had pelted the Bahamas, but no serious damage had resulted.

But what of the probability it would move westward? Rawlings tapped another key. The IBM spat out 40%.

Rawlings relaxed and took a deep puff, his mind picturing the storm as an invading army. He sat up abruptly as another thought hit him, one the IBM couldn't compute the chances on.

What if the very unusual happened—Tropical Storm Adam picked up steam, became Hurricane Adam, and moved in his exact direction?

Chancellorsville, not to mention Miami, could be history.

FRANCINE PETIT HAD BEGUN W.A.T.C.H. OUT OF ANGER.

Albert, her second husband, had shown all the vital signs of a philanthropist. More time at the office, a new secretary whom he had at first mentioned a great deal and then not at all, large checks from their joint account made out to CASH, a first-time interest in choosing a "macho cologne," mileage on the odometer that totalled twice as much as the daily round trip into Miami, and a call on the phone bill that Ma Bell informed her belonged to a Howard Johnsons in Deerfield Beach. With the money she had gotten in the divorce settlement, she had paid off the P.I. for his candid photos of Albert and his bimbo, married the detective,

and, noting a lot of married women were being similarly cast off by men who had told them to sink or swim, felt called upon to create Women Against Those Cheating Husbands. Her faith was rewarded as dozens of women clamored in her lifeboat, all willing to pay a great deal to be saved.

When it had become a scam, she didn't know. But less than a year after she and Geoff—she had changed the spelling of his name from the rather common Jeff—had offered their rather-cheap twelve-week course, they had been able to cruise to Bermuda—first-class. Now their quite-expensive, ten-week course drew more barely-married women than aerobics classes, Tupperware parties, or singles' bars. Geoff—who had grown a mustache, bought an expensive rug, and started wearing Brooks Brothers suits—was quite good. Some nights as he walked up and down the aisles, pausing to touch the clients with his eyes or roaming hands, she actually thought she was learning something about getting the goods on a cheating husband.

"Tonight," said Geoff as he sat on the long table in front of the class, "I have the *piece de resistance*."

"For all us pieces," squealed a chubby blonde in the first row who Francine knew was losing number three and quite certain she had found number four.

Some of the women, their consciousnesses sufficiently raised, booed, but others clapped. Women's lib, Francine decided as she smiled like an APPLAUSE sign, was a mixed blessing.

"Come up here, Gail," said Geoff to the speaker.

Francine noted the blonde's few false blushes before she waddled to the front of the twenty-odd women.

"Now, Gail," said Geoff, "let's suppose we encounter the ultimate predicament. You and I meet in a dark alley. You've tried Tactic Number One, the High Confident Air, progressed to W.A.T.C.H. Tactic Two, Self-generated Self-defense, and reach for Number Three."

"The Purse of Plenty," shouted a redhead from the intent audience.

"Right," said Geoff. "But you notice suddenly that that despicable husband of yours has removed your whistle, your Mace, and your switchblade. Probably he's set this whole thing up. He knew you were tailing him, trying to get the goods on him, and he deliberately led you into this dark alley where I, his hired hand, could teach you another version of his favorite lesson . . ."

"Submission," called out a gray-haired woman in the third row stimulated less by the situation than by a host of trendy \$5 cocktails Francine always supplied.

"Exactly," said Geoff.

Francine picked up the ball and ran with it. "What do husbands really want from a woman, girls?"

"Submission," they said in unison.

"What?" said Francine.

"Submission," they barked.

"I can't hear you," said Francine.

"SUBMISSION!"

Francine hung a large leather bag from Gail's shoulder while the blonde applauded.

When the noise had died, Geoff said, "But what if Gail had a little surprise for her tricky husband?"

"Like what?" said Gail.

"Reach into the bag," said Francine, "and tell me what you find."

Like a child at Christmas the plump woman did and pulled out a black box about the size of the Black and Decker drill she had given her second husband for his fortieth birthday. "What is it?" she squealed.

GAZING OUT THE TOWER WINDOW ABSENT-MINDEDLY and deeply inhaling the cigarette, Rawlings was considering sending General Lee on a direct frontal attack of the armies of the North when he noticed something was wrong. He had smoked the butt right into the filter.

As he hastily stubbed it out, his eye caught the latest information on Tropical Storm Adam. Its winds had increased to fifty-two miles per hour in less than sixty minutes.

He rechecked its position. Though Adam was still stalled out, the latitude and longitude readouts placed it at less than 150 miles south-east of Miami.

Rawlings' stomach began the familiar somersaults.

22 more miles-per-hour of speed and they had the season's initial hurricane on their hands.

It had been that way since Eden. The first-born was always the most trouble.

WITHOUT REMOVING THE BLADE FROM ITS NEWSPAPER sheath, the figure ran his fingers over its edge lightly. Sharp enough to cut—dull enough to cause pain. His eyes never wandered from the plush storefront across the street. Usually they were out by now. He had spotted her last week. Same time, same place. He had wanted to erase the affront then, to punish her, but there were too many of them, always travelling in packs like the whiney bitches they were.

It would have to be soon or he would be forced to move on. The

streets were clearing, and a man standing alone would become quite visible. Besides, the wind seemed much stronger than it had been.

Still, she must perish, for history, for the insult.

His eyes swung to the sign above the storefront. What in hell did those letters mean anyway? W.A.T.C.H.

GAIL CLUTCHED THE BLACK BOX TO HER CHEST, BLOTting out the bright-red sunburst on the t-shirt she had taken. Once it had been a proud possession of Husband #3, informing all of the dojo where he had acquired a black belt. Now, for her, she thought philosophically, the sun was a symbol of the power of universal man, of his desire to degrade and suppress women who wanted nothing more than what was rightfully theirs—half of his possessions.

Geoff said sternly, "Whatever you do, Gail, don't press the red button on the side until I've finished explaining this."

She nodded her head as her right thumb slipped across its shiny surface till it came to the red button.

Geoff continued. "What Camus called the bloodstained mathematics of our time have come to pass. Gail finds herself trapped in an alley by a huge assailant that she knows Bruce Lee would have a hard time defeating. Well, Gail, what will you do? What will you do?"

Without hesitation the blonde said, "Call Karl Malden."

The class laughed. Geoff tried to, but not very hard. A look of disgust flooding his face, he picked up a chair, raised it over his head, and crossed the room toward the blonde who was enjoying being the center of attention.

Gail looked back to see him coming. Instinctively her thumb pressed the red button.

In less than a second the machine exploded. A small barrel extended toward Geoff's chest. From its head emerged a black projectile the size of a baby's fist. Six feet away it struck the ex-investigator slightly below the sternum, knocking him backward with such force the women's gasp was as loud as the firing weapon.

As Geoff sprawled through the \$350 movie screen, tearing it apart, Francine stepped forward. "Behold," she said, "the Rod of Power, a state-of-the-art multi-discharge, pneumatic piston impactor. Yea, though you walk through the valley of the shadow of death, you shall fear no evil, for thy rod and thy staff shall accompany you."

The women applauded.

"You might say," she continued as her husband picked himself up, one hand clutching his chest and the other groping for his expensive toupee, "that we have found a way to turn man's weapon against him.

And the Rod of Power, because you had the foresight to enroll in W.A.T.C.H., can be yours for a mere \$750. What do you say?"

Gail looked down at the extended weapon in her hand and smiled. For the first time in her life she had the power she truly desired.

IN THE MIDST OF HIS TRANCE THE VISION VISITED HIM.

The faceless man walked up to the hazy woman who was all alone and stabbed her with vindictiveness right under the left breast. Christopher began to scream, his voice sounding to him like a distant siren.

Gradually he became conscious of somebody shaking him. He looked around. For a moment he saw nothing but pitch black. Then he knew whose soft hands were on his shoulder.

"Christopher, what is it?" she begged.

He looked into the deep blue eyes of the woman, but could not speak. The residual effect of the power had not yet relinquished his body.

She covered her eyes. "The gift?"

His lips formed the word several times before the "Yes" emerged.

She hugged him close. "They were right all those years ago when our step-father left us. We are damned."

Christopher forced his own blue eyes open and into the angelic face of his sister. "The knife, the self-same blade. I saw it for the fourth time. The victim was a woman, a blonde I think."

"We must do something. We must," she said, her small body shaking as though she had partaken deeply of his strange experience.

"But, Christine, we have already told the police on both sides of the bay. No one believes us. No one believes in the gift."

She stood up. "Then we will find someone who does, someone who can stop this horrible man before he kills again."

SURPRISE GREETED MIKE SHAYNE TUESDAY MORNING AS he reached for the door knob. The wooden door to his Flagler Street office seemed to open on its own.

As he walked in, he spotted the smiling face of his long-time secretary and companion standing behind the frosted glass. "How, Angel," he said, "did you know I was out there?"

"Just call it woman's intuition," said the brunette, her mouth drawing to a tease. "Besides, it's 8:30, the time you always arrive, and those size 12's of yours aren't exactly Indian moccasins, Tonto."

"Oh."

She handed him the morning paper and a stoneware mug steaming with black coffee. "You'd better hurry through the *Herald*. You've got

a client coming any minute.”

“More woman’s intuition?”

“No. A phone call about fifteen minutes ago.”

“Any idea what the caller wanted?”

“No, aside from you. Strange, though. It was a girl who sounded very young and very scared.”

Shayne walked into his private office and hung up his blue sports coat.

“Didn’t it seem unusually cold out there this morning, Michael?”

The private investigator took a deep swig of coffee and peered out the window. Gray clouds swirled in from the south, colliding overhead with stationary cumulus. “Looks like we’re in for some rough weather.”

“Radio said there’s a tropical storm stalled off the coast.”

“Reminds me more of September than January.”

“Hurricane season.” She nodded. “The weatherman said it was definitely odd for this time of year.”

Unaccountably disrupted, the big detective deposited his heavy frame in his desk chair and pulled out the sports section. No sooner had he settled into Fisher’s column than he heard the door open, and Lucy led two figures into his inner sanctum. Both were short, blond, frail, and big-eyed. With very pallid complexions they reminded him of those waifs in cheap-art prints. Dressed in similar slacks and blousey shirts, the pair would have seemed more at home sitting beneath a toadstool.

Obviously they were identical twins. Though he sensed one was male and the other female, swept-back hairdos and a solitary gold earring in the right ear of each made them difficult to distinguish at a glance. Guessing their ages was likewise impossible. The duo could have been anywhere from twelve to twenty-five.

“Michael,” said his secretary, “this is Christine and Christopher LeFey.”

Shayne stood to shake their hands and in so doing dwarfed them. As though on cue, the two stepped backward in unison. “Won’t you have a seat?” he said, trying to put them at ease. “Lucy, who don’t you get the LeFey’s some coffee?”

“No, thank you,” said the girl.

“We don’t drink coffee,” said the guy.

“Because of the caffeine,” she continued.

If he hadn’t seen both sets of lips move, the investigator would have thought the sentence was delivered by one person. “My secretary tells me you just called. What can I do for you?”

They looked at each other, then nodded.

"We've never been to a detective before," said the girl. "Not even when we tried to trace . . ."

"We don't talk about father," interrupted the man in a chiding tone.

"It's not unusual," said the redhead. "Most people who come to me are first-timers."

The man stood up abruptly. "We shouldn't even be here. We're wasting his time."

Her right hand and blue eyes reached out imploringly. "My brother," she explained, "didn't even want to come here."

"What's the use, Christine? Nobody can help us."

Shayne started to light a cigarette, but for some reason as he looked into their faces he put the Camels away. "I certainly can't help you if you don't tell me what's wrong?"

"It's Christopher's gift," she said.

"Gift?" said Lucy, settling down in the arm chair to the right of the detective's desk.

"Yes," said the female visitor and then hesitated. "My brother . . . well, he sees things."

"What do you mean?" said the redhead.

"He sees things," she repeated, "before they happen."

"A clairvoyant," said the detective, trying to sound more neutral than cynical.

"Some would call me that," said Christopher LeFey, not hiding the disdain in his voice. "Others call me prescient, a seer, an ESPer. Most just label me crazy."

Shayne locked onto his eyes. "Do you have a gift?"

"Yes."

"How long have you had this gift?" said the detective.

"This curse, you mean," he said.

Shayne was curious. "Why do you call it a curse?"

"Because I'm different and treated this way." The small man began to pace, wringing his hands all the while. "My visions just come. I have no control over when, where, or what I see."

"Are you here because of one of those visions?" said the detective.

The man withdrew to his chair and looked down.

Though unbidden, the female figure began to speak. "For almost six months Christopher hadn't experienced the gift. Then three weeks ago he woke up screaming in the middle of the night."

"What did you see?" Shayne said to the figure whose head hung low.

Christine LeFey answered. "He saw a person being killed. The next morning we were eating breakfast and watching *A.M. Miami* when he

started screaming 'The vision, the vision.' He explained that the face they were showing on television, the face of a man who was just found stabbed to death, was that in his vision."

Lucy gasped audibly and Shayne shot a glance at her. "Did you do anything about this experience?" he asked.

"No," the twin woman admitted. "Christopher was immobilized for the entire day. All he wanted was to forget what had happened, and I thought that best for him. But then it happened again."

"Did you go to the police?" said the redhead.

She raised her chin up almost haughtily. "We learned a long time ago that people don't believe in the gift. Mr. Shayne, have you ever tortured yourself by revealing a very powerful emotional experience to someone only to have them laugh in your face? Once humiliated, you don't so easily open up."

"So these visions are not uncommon?" said the investigator.

"No, but Christopher's never had one so intense. You see, he isn't just a passive receiver of these things like some occult television set. He's an empath. He feels along with the people he sees. In a very real sense my brother has been killed four times in the past three weeks."

"And you still didn't try the police?" pressed the redhead.

"Yes, despite what you may think, he has a sense of public responsibility for his gift. Christopher overcame his fears. We visited the Metro police and those on the Beach. All we got were patronizing smiles and 'don't call us, we'll call you' comments."

Shayne leaned back in his chair. Belief or disbelief wasn't the question of the moment. Her story was fascinating in itself. "Mr. LeFey, when was the last time you had one of your visions?"

The blond man looked up at the investigator. "Last night."

"Tell me exactly what you saw."

For a while LeFey seemed to be pondering whether to trust the redhead. Then he half-closed his eyes. "A blonde woman . . . heavy . . . middle-aged . . . in a bright t-shirt. She came walking out of some building . . . alone . . . at night. She was carrying a small, black box. A man appeared from behind a tree and stabbed her."

Lucy drew a deep breath. "Oh, my God," she exclaimed and stood up.

"What's wrong, Angel?" said the redhead.

Lucy Hamilton grabbed the newspaper off his desk and held up the first page. The headline read MIAMI BEACH WOMAN SLAIN.

Beneath the caption was a picture of blonde woman lying on the pavement.

CHRISTOPHER LE FEY BURIED HIS FACE IN HIS SMALL hands. He began to sob uncontrollably. His sister, who seemed to shudder in rhythm to his cries, stepped in behind him and began to rub his neck. "You've got to help us," she exclaimed.

Shayne leaned forward, his steel-gray eyes intent. "Exactly how can I help you? I don't have any training or experience with extra-sensory powers."

"That's not what I meant," she said, her fingers continuing to press against her brother's neck. "Shiatsu, the Oriental art of finger massage."

The redhead felt the question had been snatched from his mind.

"You've got to find whoever's doing the killing," she continued, "and stop him. I don't know how much more Christopher can take."

Logic told the redhead that only two types of people could help them, psychologists and cops, but something about these two—their child-like innocence and vulnerability—said to him he had no choice. He hated to admit it that a feeling beyond logic, beneath the surface, something he couldn't explain, had touched him. Instinct told him the feeling was closely akin to the way the back of his neck bristled when danger was near, the way his intuition often cracked cases his reason couldn't. He never tried to figure those things out either—he just trusted them.

Shayne stood up. "Miss LeFey, if you'll give my secretary some particulars for the standard contract, I'll be glad to look into this."

Christopher and Christine LeFey raised their heads simultaneously. Together their mouths formed an almost inaudible "Thank you."

THE MIAMI BEACH POLICE DEPARTMENT WAS TO SHAYNE what the open maw of a Great White was to a jack. Chief Petey Painter's long-standing hatred for the redhead had caused the little martinet to go out of his way on any number of occasions to make the private investigator's life miserable.

Still, David had gone into the lion's den. Luckily the department's Vice section was located on the other side of the building from Painter's office. Unfortunately the desk belonging to one of the investigator's few friends in the MBPD was empty.

"Lt. Thurman in?" he said to a detective in a flannel shirt and a day's growth.

"Where you been, fella?" came the reply. "Thurman got reassigned a couple of weeks ago."

"Where to?"

"Do I look like the Shell Answer Man? Go ask Chief Painter."

Shayne stifled his Irish temper. Walking into the corridor, he picked up a pay phone and dialed the MBPD. "Lt. Thurman."

"I'm sorry," came the reply, "but I cannot connect you at this time."

"Listen, lady," said the redhead, "if you don't want to put me through, that's O.K. with me. I mean it's no skin off my nose if this joker dies, but . . ."

"Hold on, I'll connect you."

A moment later a familiar voice said, "Thurman."

"Caron, this is . . ."

"I know who you are. I can't talk right now. Meet me at the Ranch House down the block in fifteen minutes."

"You got it."

As Shayne walked into the parking lot, he recognized two detectives getting into their green Ford. Strange, he mused, Gillespie and Traynor were with Metro. What were they doing on the Beach? Will Gentry, the Metro police chief, got along with Painter about as well as he did.

SHAYNE FINISHED THE CUP OF COFFEE HE HAD STARTED in his office at the torn-vinyl booth in the rear of the Ranch House. He had just stuck a Camel into his mouth when a match appeared. Then a soft hand pulled the lit cigarette from between his lips.

"Thanks," said Caron Thurman, taking a deep drag, "I needed that. Those jokers wouldn't allow any smoking in the conference room."

"Big meet, huh?"

She sat down without answering the question. "So tell me, big guy, do you come here often?"

Shayne looked across the scarred Formica top at the red-haired woman. The navy-blue blazer over a v-neck, white sweater did little to conceal the formidable body of the female detective. Caron Thurman had the look of a fashion model. Not one of those half-starved scarecrows on *Vogue* or *Cosmo*, but the sun-tanned vitality of one of the swimsuited lovelies on a *Sports Illustrated* calendar.

"What's the matter, Mike? Cat got your tongue? Well," she said, smiling slyly and running her tongue across her lower lip, "I got exactly what you need to loosen up. Why don't we have brunch at my place?"

"You never quit trying, do you?" said Shayne, knowing full well the lady cop knew about his relationship with his secretary. Yet, at the same time he sensed Caron's heart and little else was into the usual come-on.

"Hey," she continued, "afterwards we could pump a little iron . . ."

or whatever pops up." She squeezed the air rhythmically with her fists.

Shayne lit himself a Camel, noting again she seemed to be forcing it. "You sound like you're out of shape. Has that new assignment been keeping you out of the gym?"

"Yeah," she admitted, "but I can't talk about it. Let's try something interesting, like you and me. Now what brings you to the Beach this early?"

"I saw this story in the morning paper." He pulled out a ragged-edged clipping from his coat pocket.

Caron Thurman took the newspaper and looked at it quickly. "So?" Shayne noticed the shift in tone immediately. From fire to ice. "What can you tell me about it?"

"For Pete's sake, Mike, do you think I know about every crime committed in Dade County?" She stood up abruptly. "I gotta get back to work."

In all the time he had known her, Shayne had never seen Caron Thurman give up this easily. Usually she pursued him with a single-mindedness that bordered on obsession. Never had a simple thing like department business come between their back-scratching. Something about the article was making her edgy. "Sit down and we'll talk."

"I can't, Mike."

"This is a simple homicide. There are two of them every day in this town. That's why they call it Murder City. Did you know the victim or something?"

"Something," she said. "Now I really am leaving."

"Was it the method? Stabbing doesn't seem that unusual."

"No."

"Was it something the victim had?"

Caron Thurman was silent.

"Drugs?"

More silence.

"How about the black box she was carrying?"

She snatched the clipping and began to skim it. "I thought so. How did you know about the box?"

"Psychic, I guess."

"Come on, Mike. Nobody knew about that box but the investigating officers. We thought it might be important, so we kept that information under wraps."

"We?"

"Trust me. I have to know how you know about the black box."

"I think we have a Mexican standoff here," said Shayne.

Caron Thurman inhaled deeply on the Camel, held the smoke as if

thinking, then released it slowly. "O.K., Mike, let's deal."

"I'll tell you what I know; then you'll tell me what I want to know."

"One condition," said the female cop. "Whatever I tell you goes no farther than you."

"Why all the secrecy? Is your job on the line?"

"Yeah, but it's more than that."

"What could be more important?"

"If this gets out, Magic City becomes Panic City."

For some reason the investigator remembered seeing the Metro detectives getting into their unit. "You'd better explain that one."

She leaned in close to him so that he could smell the lightly-scented perfume. "Last night's killing wasn't the first like it."

"It's the fourth," he said, semi-guessing from what his client had told him.

She coughed on the smoke. "You *are* psychic. Just keep it down."

"Why?"

"This is serious. We think what we might have running loose in Dade County is our first serial killer."

IV

SHAYNE STARTED UP THE BUICK. LAYERS OF GRAY AND black hung overhead.

"Good idea, Mike," said Caron Thurman. "I feel much better talking with you here than in a public place. You know what happened in Chicago before they caught Gacy, in Atlanta with the child killings, L.A. with the Hillside Strangler. Son of Sam. Zodiac. We don't need that kind of mass hysteria happening here."

"Yeah, it's bad for tourism," said the detective cynically.

"You sound like Cameron. I'm sure that's why a couple of weeks ago Miami's City Manager put together a special task force to investigate the killings. Two took place in his territory, now two over here, so he wanted one group to coordinate the investigation."

"How did you end up on this elite force?"

"You mean, aside from ability? One of the victims killed down in Bal Harbour worked at The Switching Post."

"The gay bar."

"Close. TSP caters to the AC-DC crowd. The victim was a female impersonator who did a kabuki number. Billed himself as Madame Butterfly. Anyway, since I knew the territory, Painter volunteered me for Operation Coldsteel."

"Any leads?"

"Not much," Caron Thurman said, flipping a half-smoked cigarette

out the car window. "About all we've got is the similarity of method and weapon. The victim is always alone, and the weapon is always some sort of knife. No throat-slitting, just a single, well-placed blade under the sternum. Hey, I've got an idea. As long as we're partners so to speak, let's head over to Florida American University, that is, if you think this black bucket of bolts will make it."

"Why should it?"

"One of the faculty in the Shrink Department is being added to the operation as a consultant. He's done a lot of research on random murders, and I'm supposed to talk to him."

Shayne slid through a yellow light. Any minute now he was going to be asked to fulfill his part of the bargain. The lady cop wasn't in the habit of doling out free lunches. "What about the victims? Any connection?"

"Two men, two women, two different sides of the bay. Four different occupations, different ages. We've got somebody working up deep background research on each one."

"To see if they went to the same high school type of thing?"

"Yeah, but we haven't even had a match in eye color yet."

"What makes you positive there is a serial killer?"

"I told you. The weapon's the same. Ditto the M.O. Autopsies showed the diameter of the entry wound was the same right down to the last silly millimeter. We've also established the length of the blade as between 15-20 centimeters."

"Six to eight inches. What's the time frame on these killings?"

"One a week. We got in on it after last Monday's slaying of a car salesman."

"That's two, counting last night. Did the other two also occur on Mondays?"

"Yes. That's another similarity I should have mentioned." She reclined in the seat as if sunning herself on the beach and closed her eyes.

"Your turn."

"If I try that move, the car'll crash."

"Cut it, Mike. I'm in no mood for joking. I haven't had a good night's sleep this last week. Now, how did you know about the box and the four killings?"

"A client."

"Then your client must be the killer."

"There's another conclusion you could draw."

"How?"

"My client is truly psychic. He saw, not committed, the murders."

"Come on, Mike. You can make up better tales than that."

"I'm not kidding you. My client came in this morning and described last night's killing right down to the black box."

"And you believed them?"

"Apparently my client hadn't yet seen the newspaper report, and even if that weren't true, as you said, the box wasn't mentioned in it."

Caron Thurman sat up straight in the Buick's front seat. "O.K., stud. Take me to Madame Rose."

"My client's a guy."

"Can you tell me the name of this all-knowing, all-seeing mystic soothsayer and sage?"

"That's confidential."

She exploded. "You mean you got me to breach departmental security just to be reminded of the rather shakey principle of client confidentiality. I'm not playing games, Mike. You either tell me who your client is, or so help me I'll run your butt in faster than some street slime."

"You know me better than that," the redhead said coolly. "I won't tell you, but I will help you. We do it your way and how many more slayings do you think you'll have before your case against me comes to court? The best solution is to cooperate."

"You've already frustrated the hell out of my personal life, and now this. O.K., let's make the best of a bad situation."

Shayne lit her another cigarette. "It could be worse. Think how bad you'd look if Painter found out your chief suspect was a male palm-reader."

"WHO IN HELL IS THIS?"

Shayne shook his head at the speaker. Dr. Nathan Freed was a gaunt man who had let the hair grow on the top of his head and his chin in an attempt to hide his scarecrow figure. Bottles of vitamins and minerals lined his desk, and a basket of fruit sat in the middle. He was also a chain-smoker whose office looked like a smog-filled L.A. morning.

"Mr. Shayne, like you Dr. Freed," explained Lt. Thurman, "is a consultant on this case. Frankly, we need all the help we can get, which brings up another point. Why weren't you at the task force meeting this morning?"

"Lieutenant, unlike you I have academic responsibilities and am unable to pursue with a single-mindedness some secondary goals."

Shayne glanced at the card on his door. "The professor means he had a class this morning."

"He could have said so," said the lady cop.

Shayne flipped open his notepad. "I'm curious about mass mur-

derers in general, doc. What can you tell me?"

"Very little, I'm afraid." Freed lit a cigarette. "Criminology is not like mathematics, an exact science, but there are a few patterns."

"Such as?" said the private investigator.

"Multiple murderers tend to be male, white, and older than the average killer. Most of them stay near home and generally they kill people they know. Guys like Charles Whitman who shot fourteen people at the University of Texas in '66 from that tower are the exception that the layman takes as the rule."

"Are they insane?" said the MBPD detective.

"Not by the standard legal definition," answered the professor.

"Any basic personality profile," said Shayne, "or does it take all types?"

"Depends which study you read. I guess you could say criminal psychology is still in its infancy." The professor paced as he talked, and as he spoke both his pacing and speech became more rapid. "Some think the serial killer is absolutely Mr. Ordinary and reacts against being just one of the crowd. Others think he's a paranoid who runs through a string of defeats and finally explodes. There's evidence that a lot are former mental patients with a defective sense of reality. Most of us have aggressive tendencies, but the mass murderer tends to have such a superfluity of them that the killing of a single person cannot satisfy his aggressive needs."

"Are there any outward signs of the problem?" said Shayne.

"Some of these people have fooled expert forensic psychiatrists. They exhibit no guilt over what they've done."

Caron Thurman crossed her legs, pulled her white skirt over her knees, and said, "What about sex? Do they tend to have sexual hang-ups?"

"You mean more than we all do?" said the professor with a laugh as he extinguished his cigarette.

Shayne guessed it was an in-joke.

"Seriously, lieutenant, some studies have suggested they are sexual sadists, but the material I've read over about our man contained not so much as a hint of sexual abnormalities."

"Does the problem go back to the killer's childhood, doc?" said Shayne.

"Maybe. Abused children are a possibility, so too is family breakup, even sex chromosomes." Freed picked up an apple from his desk and began to bite off hunks. "You want the truth where I was this morning, lieutenant? I was right here. As you can see, there is so little agreement, I felt impotent, useless."

"Thanks for the background, doc," said Shayne. He and Caron Thurman both stood up. As he shook Freed's hand, he felt as though the professor had just come from a steam bath.

Shayne's holding open the door drew a frown from the liberated cop.

"Just a minute," called Dr. Freed. "There is one thing I can say with absolute certainty."

"What's that?" said Caron Thurman.

"Unless you stop him, he will kill and kill again. He may even increase his frequency."

V

SHAYNE PICKED UP THE FOLDER LABELLED *JEFFRIES, GAIL*—Victim #4 and began to reread it. Maybe this time some connection between the four killings would rear its ugly head, some detail he had previously overlooked. 31, dyed blonde, 5' 4", 146 pounds. Caucasian. Religion—none. Housewife. No children. Third marriage. North Miami address. Found in parking lot of W.A.T.C.H. by Francine Petit, proprietor, at 9:48 P.M. Witnesses verified Petit's story.

Nothing apparent, but the victim's marital life might be worth looking into. He'd wait on her until Caron had worked up some more background.

He poured himself a half-snifter of Martell and opened another manila folder.

FINE, MORRIS—#1. 60, bald, 5' 2", 160 pounds. Caucasian. Jewish. Owner of Fine Electronics, a wholesale outfit in downtown Miami. Married, once. One son, killed in 'Nam (1969). Coral Gables residence. Found by clerk on opening warehouse in morning at 7:10 A.M. Clerk's tale verified by four co-workers.

A dead end. Not a single lead worth pursuing. Shayne reached down into the litter on his coffee-table.

HARRIS, JON—#2. 22, black hair, 6', 140 pounds. Negro. Religion—none. Unmarried. Shayne pulled out a supplemental report. Dancer. In Miami for past three years only. Originally from Dubuque, Iowa. Transvestite. Yellow sheet with three priors for soliciting, one for indecent exposure, one DUI. Miami Beach address. Employed as entertainer at The Switching Post. Found in his dressing room/van at 1:56 A.M. by club owner, one-time lover named Sparks, Richard. Sparks has concrete alibi for time of murder.

A guy like Harris drew trouble and made lots of enemies. Ripe for investigation, at least a chat with Caron. But was there any connection between him and the others? Nothing yet suggested the other two had any sexual abnormalities. Then there was another problem—Harris

seemed to fit the profile of the killer more than that of a victim.

#3 was LAYNE, JANET. Shayne glanced at the photo. Like the others she was plain. Light-brown hair, 28, 5' 6", 120 pounds. Car salesman—make that salesperson. Found in the Coral Gables sales-room the morning after a Sellathon ended draped over the seat of one of their new models by her husband who owns the place at 7:50 A.M.

The private investigator drained the glass. Empty. Nothing seemed to link the victims' background, appearance, age, financial condition, and residence. The killings indeed did seem random.

Shayne got up from the couch and stretched his back. Outside his apartment the wind had changed from a whistle to a ferocious growl. He pulled a sweatshirt out of the bureau and put it on. After Florida American, he had dropped a still-smoldering lady cop off at her car outside the Ranch House. At mid-afternoon a messenger had brought the photocopies of Operation Coldsteel's files by the office. Since then, he had every smudge and wrinkle in them memorized.

Feeling hungry, he removed the burnt skillet from where it perpetually soaked in the sink and cracked three eggs into it. He added a little milk and butter. Then he diced some left-over ham, added it, and over medium-low began to beat the mixture with a fork.

Another feeling rested in the pit of his stomach—guilt. He had used Caron. She had come through like a champ, and he had given her little if nothing. Still, instinct spoke strongly that to turn her loose on Christopher LeFey was not the answer—at least, not yet. Who knew what her kind of pressure would do to his frail temperament? He'd have to stall the lady cop until something broke.

He slid the steaming eggs onto a paper plate. Sometimes you had to seek a justice higher than the law could provide. You had to believe in your instincts, in stories that your reason could attack at a hundred fronts. That was the hell of being human.

Thunder cracked loudly with the report of gunfire. Shayne stared at the yellow-lit, low-hanging clouds. No rain yet. The sky seemed to be dry-heaving.

He heard another noise, not as loud as the previous one, but he was disoriented and couldn't figure out the source. When it echoed through the hotel-apartment again, he realized his hearing had magnified a simple doorknock.

Peering through hole, he saw only the back of a blonde head closeup. The detective unlatched the door.

"Mr. Shayne, I had to come."

THE SPEAKER WAS CHRISTINE LE FEY. HER BLONDE HAIR

had been swept back so that the redhead finally got a close look at her face. Her features were more well-formed than he had thought earlier in the day—she looked older. She had a strange beauty he couldn't put his finger on as he opened the door. "Come on in. It's getting nasty out there."

"I'm sorry. I just looked up your address in the phone book. I must seem a fright. I had to see you. Christopher isn't with me. The hotel clerk said I could come up."

She seemed as disoriented as he had felt moments ago. "Can I fix you some coffee?"

"No, but a good belt of scotch would be nice."

Shayne continued to look at her.

"Why do I feel I'm being carded? God, that hasn't happened to me since I was a freshman in college, and that was over twenty years ago."

The redhead knew he had also been slightly off in calculating her age earlier. He found her a clean glass and the Johnny Walker. "Straight up?"

"Ice, please."

By the time he brought her the drink, she had slipped off a green poncho and was sitting at the couch in front of his folders. "I don't know where to start," she said, accepting the glass. Her eyes darted back and forth like a bird that couldn't make up its mind to land. "The beginning, isn't that where they always tell you to start? Christopher and I have had a hard life."

Shayne sat down in the easy chair across from her, close enough to show interest, but not near enough to intrude. "I imagine being a twin is a unique experience."

"Did you know I'm the older? You see I was born in the last two minutes of 1945, Christopher in the first two of 1946. In between our mother died. Maybe that was an omen that our lives would be dominated by death."

"I don't follow."

"Two years later our step-father died. Throughout the years it was one foster home after another. Sometimes Christopher and I were together—mostly we were apart. Maybe it was because I missed him when we were separated and vice-versa, or maybe it was because even then my brother had strange feelings about our keepers, but everybody kept giving up on us. Don't you give up, too, Mr. Shayne."

"I won't. As you can see from the folders in front of you, I've been collecting as much material as I can."

She picked one up, glanced at it, and then did the same with another. "What does this Operation Coldsteel notation mean?"

"It's just a reference to some people who helped me," Shayne said.

"Why do I feel you're not telling me everything? But that's nothing new. Could I have a refill please?"

As Shayne prepared her another drink, he felt somehow trapped between the strange, elfin woman on one hand and the loudly cracking thunder on the other. An ominous feeling shot through him at the precise moment a jagged fork of lightning tore a hole in the dark sky.

She jumped. Shayne handed her the drink. "Did you stop by to fill me in on your past for some reason?"

"LeFey isn't our real last name. It's MacLean. Christopher used to read a lot to escape from the stares and taunts of others. How would you like to be called 'Witch-child' by people state agencies declare as reasonable and fit? Anyway, since Morgan LeFey was the witch who helped to effect the downfall of Camelot, my brother thought it an appropriate surname."

"You and Christopher seem to have different personalities," said Shayne, trying to find the calm in the eye of the storm.

"Our psychologist says I'm the mother and he's the child, if that's what you mean?"

"No, you seem more . . ."

"Stable than Christopher. Maybe that's because I'm off lithium and he's addicted to it."

Shayne knew the drug was being used to counter sudden changes in mood.

Without warning her body began to quiver. Shayne started to cross the gap between them. "Don't," she said. "Don't come near me. I can't bear to have another man touch me."

"Other than Christopher," Shayne said automatically.

"Yes, but not the way you think." She pulled out a handkerchief and began to dab her eyes. "Neither one of us has ever been able to have what you and our psychologist would call a normal relationship with a member of the opposite sex. I don't know how to explain it, but every time something starts to happen to me, like right now, I feel my brother watching me, staring at my every move as though he were in this very room."

Shayne stood up, very much aware he was playing out of his league. "Does this 'seeing' work both ways?"

"No, I feel things, but my brother tells me that with him it's more intense, that he really can see through my eyes."

"Where is Christopher at this moment?"

"He's—you're testing me. You wanted to see if I'd say behind the sofa, or in the kitchen, didn't you?"

That funny feeling was starting to take shape. "No. I want to know where his real, live body is at this exact moment." Shayne noted she hid her head exactly the way her brother had in the office. Their relationship was uncanny, undecipherable.

"That," she said, "is one of the reasons I came."

"Can you explain?"

"Christopher has had four visions, each one more intent than the others, each one just before a person has died. During these visions he is like a man with a seizure. When they have ended their possession of him, he has immediately left our apartment."

"And gone where?"

"I don't know."

"And the real reason you came to see me tonight," said Shayne, suddenly seeing clearly, "is that you're worried he's turning them into self-fulfilling prophecies."

"Yes, for that and one other reason."

"What's that?"

"Just an hour ago Christopher had another vision, an unusually powerful one."

FOR A MOMENT SHAYNE THOUGHT HE WAS GOING OUT OF his alleged mind. He had just studied four files, and maybe because he had been too close or because he hadn't wanted to consider the possibility, he had missed the most obvious connection.

Christopher LeFey was a common denominator in the four killings. But, the detective wondered, had the small, blond man done more than just prophesy the deaths? "You're sure," Shayne pressed, "you don't know where he went?"

"No."

"When he's gone out the four previous times, do you know where he went?"

"No, I don't know."

"But you suspect he went after four people?"

"Yes."

The detective stared through the window at the overhead night-time display. Like a neon arcade the sky was lit, but no rain fell. "Your brother's last vision. Did he say anything about it?"

"When he has his seizures, it's as though Christopher is really there. A tour guide, so to speak."

"Close your eyes," said Shayne. "Try to recall his exact words."

After her eyelids had been pressed shut a while, she began to sway like a fakir's snake responding to an unheard flute. Then, she started to

speak, but in a slightly lower voice. "I'm coming to a huge building." Her voice changed again. "A hurricane warning is now in effect for all of Dade County . . . the bright red on the radar scope represents intense storm activity . . . winds in excess of 90 m.p.h." Then her voice reverted to its original distortion. "A long tunnel . . . rain and wind pelt the glass like children trying desperately to get in . . . the waves are cresting at fifteen feet . . . shark's teeth . . . a great white jaw . . . two submarines . . . one yellow . . . sailboat. The kid is working late, doing research. He doesn't see the shadow moving toward him. The knife guides the shadow like a beacon. Watch out! He's behind you. NOOOOO!"

Christine LeFey collapsed on the couch. Her eyes were still open and staring vacantly upward. Sweatbeads dotted her face. Shayne felt her pulse. It was racing. "Are you all right?"

"What happened?" she murmured.

Unable to answer her question, Shayne wet a towel in the bathroom, then placed it on her forehead. Gently he lifted up her feet and put a pillow under them. He wasn't sure what to do. The first-aid manuals had never covered this possibility. "Has this ever happened to you before?"

"Has what ever happened before?"

"You were in some sort of trance. You spoke in two distinct voices. Neither one was your own."

"Voices?"

"One sounded like your brother's. You described something you were seeing."

"A vision. I've never had one before, but what you've said sounds like what happens to Christopher." A faraway look covered her face. "Maybe I'm a lot more like him than I thought. This is your apartment, isn't it? Do you know where I was just now?"

"I'm not sure," said the investigator, aware how fast time was passing, "but I'm going to have to take a chance."

SHAYNE TURNED OFF I-95 ONTO THE RICKENBACKER Causeway. Black clouds whirled overhead as though they had sucked up the thunder and lightning. Heavy winds buffeted the Buick, forcing him from one side of the road to the other on the exposed bridge. Luckily all of Miami's sane people were off the road. Dark waves reached up from below, their watery fingers splashing across the heavy automobile.

Feeling in the midst of his own nightmare, he was relieved as he drove onto Virginia Key. He was glad, too, that Lucy had been able to

come over to his hotel-apartment. Christine LeFey was in no condition, physical or legal, to be left alone.

He pulled into the barely-lit parking lot. Palm fronds blew by, and two light poles had already been bent over, the broken glass gleaming like tears on the pavement. The area seemed deserted, the usual teenage crowd having shown unusual maturity by staying home. Planet Ocean was a museum-exhibition hall whose 100,000 square feet of displays, movie theatres, and demonstrations all testified to the majesty and strength of what covered three-quarters of the earth's surface.

A branch missed by, and the wind nearly knocked him down as he got out of the car. He felt like a punch-drunk fighter weaving his way across a ring. Gradually he battled his way toward the dimly-lit entrance.

Something like a huge, stuffed laundry sack leaned against the base of the glass entrance. As the readhead fought closer, he could see it was a person. Blond hair and a green poncho fluttered in the storm.

Something else lept up at the detective. On the other side of the glass-paneled door, staring at him as if from a fish bowl, were a pair of wide-open eyes.

Victim #5?

VII

BY THE TIME LT. CARON THURMAN HAD GOTTEN FIVE feet from her car, her pale sweat-suit was already drenched. In the time between Shayne's call and her arrival, the skies had finally let loose. At the moment the redhead felt as though he may as well have been standing in a swimming pool.

"You'd better have a good reason for interrupting my workout," she shouted over the wind. "It's the first time . . . Oh, shit!" Her eyes dropped to Shayne's feet. "Do you want to tell me what's happened here?"

The detective stood above the body of Christopher LeFey that he had been afraid to touch for fear of a possible neck injury. "You said you wanted to meet my client."

"What's wrong with him?"

"I don't know, but there's a softball-sized knot growing on his forehead and it's leaking."

"Did you call an ambulance?"

"Right before you. I guess with this storm they're all tied up."

"I can understand that. Trying to get out here, I felt like a small boat in the middle of the ocean." She knelt down and began to wipe the sheeting water off the glass door. "Who's that?" she said, pointing

inside.

"I don't know, but an ambulance isn't going to do him any good."

"Are you sure? You didn't touch anything, did you?"

Shayne stared through the curtain of water at her. "Look at that red splotch on his chest. I didn't have to disturb anything to know Operation Coldsteel had another victim to investigate."

She wiped the rain off her face. "It's beginning to look like Dr. Freed was right on target this morning."

THE EMERGENCY ROOM OF MIAMI MERCY REMINDED Shayne of a unit at Bedlam, but at least it was dry. Every few minutes another ambulance or police vehicle arrived. The onslaught of Adam had been a great boost to the hospital's population.

"It's not bad enough we've got some nut running round, but we've also got to have an out-of-season storm," said the lady cop, her body still shivering. "It's like the whole city's gone wacky."

"My radio said another ten miles per hour and we've got a hurricane on our hands." Shayne rubbed his palms together. "Hope it's not like 1926 all over."

"What happened then, old man of the concrete jungle?"

"The old-timers still talk about 138 mile-per-hour winds, and that was before the instruments blew away. They say the barometric pressure here was the lowest ever recorded."

"Thanks, I needed that. You got a cigarette?"

Shayne handed her a soggy pack. "Take your pick."

She threw it down in disgust. "At least I've caught the killer and can get back to . . ."

"Whoa! What are you talking about?"

"Your client. You remember? The one found red-handed at the scene of the crime."

"Looks to me like he came awfully close to being a victim himself. He still may be if he doesn't come out of that coma."

"Come on, Mike. You said yourself he told you about the crimes, described things only the killer could have known, and we found him with a dead man not two feet away. The way I figure it is they struggled, and your client got a bump on the head trying to get away."

Shayne stepped aside to let a gurney fly by. "Tell me, Ms. District Attorney, then why was he on the other side of the glass door? And what about the murder weapon? Did you find it?"

"Of course not. It could have been five feet away in all this mess, and we'd have missed it. Don't worry! As soon as this storm blows over, we'll find it. Part of the team is already out there. And as for the glass

door, he was trying to get away, ran into it, and blacked out."

"But what if he really did see something?"

"Get real, Mike. You're not going to shovel that psychic load of bull again. You know as well as I do that there's not a jury anywhere in the country that'll buy that."

"Caron, you never asked me how I got out to Planet Ocean when I did. Do you think I'm his accomplice?"

"I'm getting to that. Why were you there?"

A frazzled nurse carrying two I.V. bottles bumped into him as she hurried past. "Because I saw something tonight that I don't know how to explain to you. Hell, I can't even explain it to myself."

"What's that?"

"A women in a trance had a vision that this was going to happen."

"I wouldn't let that get out."

"Why not?"

"How's it going to look for your reputation if people think the great Miami detective solves his cases with the aid of a fortune teller?"

"Right now I don't really care what people think. All I know is I was told about the murder in detail before it happened."

"O.K., big guy, I'll bite. Who was this medium?"

"Michael," came the familiar voice of Shayne's secretary from the E.R. entrance.

The redhead turned. A very wet Lucy Hamilton stood beside a dripping Christine LeFey.

"How is my brother?" said the blonde woman from beneath her green poncho.

"We're not sure yet," said Shayne, moving toward the two women. "He's behind that white curtain. The doctors have promised to let us know as soon as his condition stabilizes."

"Hello, lieutenant," said Lucy coldly as Caron Thurman approached the trio.

Shayne heard more of the unsaid that passed between the two women. In a less civilized age he knew they would be wrestling on the floor.

The female cop nodded noncommittally. Then she turned to Shayne and gestured at Christine LeFey. "Is this the lady with the crystal ball and the funny deck of cards?"

Shayne nodded.

"The police?" said Christine. "Are they going to arrest Christopher?"

A man in a white jacket and Miami Dolphins cap walked up from behind the curtain and over to the group. "I'm Dr. Schwartz. Lt.

Thurman, is it?"

She shook her head.

"The man you brought in his just come around."

"Thanks, doc," she said. "I need to question him as soon as possible."

"Not tonight, I'm afraid," said Schwartz.

"You don't understand," protested Caron Thurman. "He's a suspect in . . ."

"I don't care if he's the reincarnation of Jack the Ripper," said the doctor. "He's suffered multiple contusions to the head. We're going to keep him here for observation. You can come back in twenty-four hours and we'll see."

"Doc."

"This is a medical matter first, lieutenant."

"O.K.," she glared, "but I'm going to post a guard outside his room."

"And I'm posting a nurse to watch him," said the doctor. "Nobody goes into my patient's room through tomorrow except medical personnel."

Christine LeFey grabbed Shayne's arm. "You can't let them arrest him. They'll take him back to that horrible place."

"What place?" said Shayne.

"Chattahoochee," said Christine. "The state hospital. And if he goes back there, he'll surely die."

VIII

CARON THURMAN PEERED THROUGH THE HALF-OPEN venetian blinds. "Doesn't even look like daytime out there. Between this storm and what we found last night, I didn't get a wink of sleep. You?"

"The same." Shayne stretched as he glanced out the third-floor window of the MBPD Conference Room. "The experts don't know how to explain the storm. Not only is it out of season, but it's not following a regular pattern."

"Is it officially a hurricane yet?"

"No, but it may as well be. Look at the waves, the erosion on the beach. Palm trees have been blown down, bent, and twisted. The strip seems a ghost town."

"Have you seen this?" She handed him a copy of the *Daily News*.

"I couldn't find one." He glanced at the headline—IS KNIFE-SLAYER ON THE LOOSE?

"So far the press is speculating," she said. "If it weren't for this

storm, they'd be doing a lot more."

Shayne tossed a quarter in a coffee tin and filled a styrofoam cup. It looked at him like a single black eye. Whose? he wondered. "Any word on Christopher LeFey?"

"The doctor told me a little while ago there's been no real change since last night. I'm going over in a little to talk to him."

She moved in close, and Shayne could feel the tautness of her left breast through his sports coat.

Caron Thurman said, "Did you take your secretary and Miss LeFey home last night?"

"Yeah. I thought it best Christine stay with Lucy."

"That's good news and bad," she said, looking up into his face. "I mean I'm glad you're keeping LeFey's sister close as I'm going to have to talk with her later, but on a personal level, I could have used some company last evening. The night seemed to go on forever."

"You didn't ask me to come over this morning for personal reasons, did you? We've been through that before."

"No, I was just being honest with you, Mike. You don't have to remind me about your little relationship with Lucy Hamilton. That's your problem, not mine."

At that moment Shayne felt more than physically close to Caron Thurman. They had worked together in the past and undoubtedly would in the future. Something had been growing inside him toward her, and he had a fear that it was more than respect. Whatever it was, though, now wasn't the time to explore it. "It's almost noon," he said, noting the wallclock. "Didn't you say something about Dr. Freed coming over?"

"Yes. He should have been here by now, but something has come up you and I can discuss while waiting. First, I've got a confession to make. When you first proposed we work together, I didn't think you'd follow through, especially when you tried to weasel out. But, you came through, even gave me your client in a bad situation."

Shayne deliberately walked away from her and the window. "I didn't have much choice, did I? I admit I don't always play by the rules, but how long do you think I'd have held onto my license if I had failed to report a felony, especially one I was a witness at?"

"Good point."

Shayne noticed the shift in tone. Colder, more business-like. She pulled a file out of a leather portfolio that was sitting on the table and tossed it at the redhead like a challenge. Shayne picked it up. Across the top was written MACLEAN, CHRISTOPHER, his client's real name, and a case number.

"Your client has more than a passing acquaintance with the law!" said Caron Thurman, the exclamation point coming out more like an icicle.

"Christine LeFey mentioned that last night, but on the way back to Lucy's, whenever I pressed her, she clammed up. Why did he end up at Chattahoochee?"

"It started with a misdemeanor about a year ago."

"For what?"

"Disturbing the peace."

"How?"

"He was found ranting and raving in Flamingo Park. Two officers had to restrain him."

The door popped open, and a highly agitated Dr. Nathan Freed walked in, a metal briefcase in one hand and a banana in the other. "I want you to know a telephone pole came within a foot of ending a rather promising career. I hope why you wanted me to come all the way over here this morning was worth it."

"Where were you earlier?" fired out Caron Thurman. "I called your home phone about 6:00 this morning, but nobody answered. I finally had to leave a message with your departmental secretary."

"With the storm so bad I slept in my office." He peeled the banana and began to eat. "What were you two talking about when I came in?"

"I was explaining to Mike about his client's stay at Chattahoochee," she said.

Shayne could feel the caffeine starting to take effect. "Are you telling me that he was sent all the way up to the Florida panhandle to the state mental hospital for something as simple as disturbing the peace?"

Nathan Freed shook his head and swallowed. "Makes you wonder which one's insane, the people there or the people who put him there?"

Caron Thurman placed both palms on the table and leaned against them. "It's a bad situation, Mike."

"That's an understatement," said the consulting psychologist. "About one-fourth of all the population up there are from Dade County. Makes us look like America's looney-tunes capital."

"How come so many?" said Shayne.

"Under new police policy," said Freed, "most of the people charged with minor, non-violent offenses are herded into maximum-security forensic units."

"Didn't they once send such people to Jackson Memorial Hospital?" said Shayne.

"Our Bellevue," commented Freed.

"They used to," said Caron.

"Now," said the psychologist, "the authorities are afraid that people charged with crimes shouldn't be treated in ordinary, unsecured mental hospitals."

The lady cop said, "My superiors felt that Jackson Memorial was too much a revolving door. The charges would be dropped so that the offender could receive treatment. Three-days later the hospital kicked him loose, and we were picking him up for committing the same crime again."

"Typical bureaucratic over-reaction," said Freed. "Chalk up a giant step backward for manunkind. Pretty soon we'll be locking up anybody with a mental problem and throwing away the key. The trouble with that is recent studies have shown that one out of every five adults suffers from some psychiatric disorder. So at that rate we'll soon have some 30 million Americans living out their lives in padded condos and white jackets that fasten in the back."

"Doc," said Caron Thurman, "I think you're the one who's over-reacting."

Shayne said, "Tell that to Christine. She seemed awfully concerned last night that her brother was going to be sent back."

Freed filled the silence by pouring himself a cup of coffee and not paying. "Who is this Christine and the guy you're talking about at Chattahoochee?" he said, suddenly paying attention.

"Right now, he's our prime suspect." The cop pulled a form out of the file still in Shayne's hand and gave it to the consultant. "Why don't you to look this over. Later in the day when we get to talk to him, we want you to be there."

Freed began to study the report.

"Mike," said Caron Thurman, "I think you ought to look at the rest of that file."

"Why?"

"Just look. We've already done a fair amount of research on LeFey/MacLean. So far we've been able to establish he had a definite connection with two of the victims."

"Connection. What kind?"

"It's more than psychic. He brought a TV set needing repair to Fine Electronics."

"Coincidence?"

"Maybe, but how do you explain that the car we found out at Planet Ocean last night was registered to one LeFey, C.? The nameplate on the rear I.D.-ed it as sold at Magic City Toyota. We called them, and their records indicated it was bought almost a month ago by your client. Guess who the salesperson was?"

"Janet Layne?"

"Bingo. And I'm sure a little more research will turn up a link between him and the other three victims."

"But what motive could he have?" said Shayne.

"Anything," said Dr. Freed without looking up from the report. "That's the real problem with serial killers. The least little thing becomes a major driving force in their lives. It could be something as simple as a suspicious look from a stranger, a phone call, being called down by their boss."

The phone in the middle of the wooden table rang. Caron Thurman picked it up. "What? . . . How? . . . I'll be right there." Hanging up, she announced, "Looks like we got a problem bigger than Tropical Storm Adam out there. Your client just snuck out of Miami Mercy."

IX

ALL THE SIGNPOSTS WERE DOWN, OR TWISTED, OR MISleading on Shayne's way back to Miami. While he knew that he was driving toward the mainland, the marker on the Tuttle Causeway had been flipped around so that it indicated he was going EAST. He was glad the drive was familiar. I-95 had never seemed so deserted in the afternoon. Most of the exit signs had been torn from their girders and lay mangled on the roadside. The hands of a Barnett Bank clock indicated 9:35. He checked his Seiko. 12:21. Only the tall SHELL gasoline sign seemed to speak the truth. The S had been ripped off.

Yeah, all the signposts were down. Storms like this one weren't supposed to form in January, much less hit Miami, but Adam had. No two people were identical. Then how could Christopher and Christine LeFey be so alike? The LeFeyes were really the MacLeans. And how did you tell a man from a woman without a scorecard? People who commit simple misdemeanors don't end up in maximum-security forensic wards—one had. People in comas didn't walk out of well-guarded hospital rooms—Christopher LeFey had. Police evidence dictated that his client was the serial killer. Shayne's logic said the same thing, but somewhere within him an undefinable instinct told him Christopher LeFey was innocent.

Caron Thurman had been close. It wasn't just the city that had gone wacky, though—it was everything he had always counted on. People, indicators, thought processes, traditions.

He swung the Buick onto the Dixie Highway. Just before leaving the MBPD he had called Lucy's apartment. Through a bad connection he had told his secretary LeFey had escaped, but not to tell his sister. Then he had gotten the LeFeyes' home address from Lucy.

Cocoanut Grove was just ahead. A malfunctioning street light

winked a jaundiced eye at him, and the road map in his head told him to turn left on Breck Avenue. The wind shoved against the nose of the Buick. The speedometer read 45—it felt like 25. 4330 was a duplex.

The wind was swirling the rain upwards when he stepped out. It came in under his parka as he fought his way up the cracked sidewalk. *B*, the number Lucy had given him, was to the left. He pulled out a thin lock-pick from his wallet. In this weather who would notice, and right now he didn't give a damn.

When the door opened, he reached inside and fumbled along the wall till he found a switch. The light must have been broken. As his eyes grew used to the strange, early-afternoon dark inside, he flipped on a table lamp. It worked.

He took off his rain parka and shut the door. When he thought he had a pretty good idea where everything was, he flipped the light off. He sat down in the only chair he could see, a white-plastic contour, and waited. Where was Christopher LeFey going to go? This seemed the likeliest place. Besides, the police hadn't booked him, and from what the detective remembered of the file the small man's home address hadn't been listed. If the cops did show up, he had an unarrested client, a good reason for being here.

Beneath a birdcage in which sat a stuffed toy pussycat, he spotted the television set. He glanced behind it. Wired to the rear of the Sony was a repair order marked paid. It was made out to Christine LeFey. The only way he usually checked out his clients was by an interview—today demanded an exception to established procedure.

He walked into the bedroom. A solitary round waterbed sat in the middle. He opened a closet. Two of everything, side by side, were attached to white-plastic hangers. He looked at the shoe sizes. All 5's. The clothing in the lone bureau was the same. Uni-sex carried to the extreme.

He walked back in the living room and found he was seeing better. For the first time he noticed a painter's canvas on a tripod. Hung along the front wall were various paintings, all without frames. As an art critic, he was limited to knowing what he liked—as a psychologist, he knew even less, but none of the pictures was a proportional representation of reality. Atop a huge lion's body sat a tiny, bird-like head. Still-lives had worms larger than the apples they were eating. Adjoining walls met at odd angles. Colors clashed like an old man trying to coordinate his dress. All the lines lacked focal points. No two paints were alike except for one thing. In the upper, right-handed corner were a pair of initials—CL.

He tried the kitchen. The sink was stacked high with styrofoam

plates and plastic utensils. In the refrigerator he found canned goods and several mason jars filled with what looked like Kool-Aid. Over the wall table hung two photographs, one in black and white and one in color. Both quite old. The same woman was in both. In the one on the left she had blonde hair pulled tightly back to reveal a beautiful face dominated by large, full lips. A ribbon around her neck separated her head from a skin-tight, scoop-neck top and A-shaped skirt. Beside her was a man in a World War II vintage uniform. He craned his neck and made out the word on his breast pocket—MACLEAN. In the picture on the right the woman's face had more makeup, and her hair, held in place by a red bandana, was longer and looser. She had on a two-piece bathing suit, the bottom of which bulged and was big enough to be shorts. She was lying in a chaise lounge beside a man with short, dark hair and Oriental eyes. Across his body was written FOREVER, TANGE.

Judge not lest ye be judged, hell. Judge not because you don't know what in hell you're doing, he told himself as he returned to the chair. It seemed pliable as though it had contoured itself to his large frame. The detective closed his eyes. His head hurt and he felt tremendously tired like he had just run the beach through hurricane winds. So many things pressed in on him.

SOME TIME LATER HIS EYES SHOT OPEN. HE HAD BEEN having a disquieting dream or maybe a daydream. He couldn't tell. Outside the winds sounded like he was standing in the middle of a runway at Miami International.

For some reason he went straight to the bathroom and opened the medicine chest. Lining all four shelves were vials of pills. He squinted and turned the labels toward himself. Then he found it. Lithium. Beneath the directions were two things that scared him.

They were prescribed for *Christine LeFey* by one *Dr. Nathan Freed*.

Somewhere there had to be a phone. He checked all the rooms before he finally found it. Sitting in the coat closet. He dialed the MBPD and asked for Caron Thurman. While he waited, he listened to the phone crackling like a short circuit.

"Hello," came her voice.

"Caron, Mike."

"We haven't been able to pick up even a trace of your client."

"Is Freed with you?"

"No. Listen, the strangest thing happened just after you left the station. Freed all of a sudden threw down the file and told me he'd put his resignation from Coldsteel in the mail. When I asked him why, he said

something about conflict of interest."

"That figures."

"Care to explain that one?" she said through static.

"Later," said Shayne. "Thanks."

"Oh, one more thing. We got some data on victim #5. Killed by a weapon identical to the first four. He was a student at Florida American. Getting a degree in Marine Biology. The Planet Ocean thing was a part-time job. I feel sorry about his view of America. He was an exchange student."

"From Japan," said the detective.

"Yes. How did you . . ."

"I'll explain it to you later. Something more important has come up." He hung up and quickly dialed his secretary. The phone started to ring. "Come on, Lucy. Pick it up," he screamed.

Suddenly the line was dead.

He depressed the buttons.

Nothing.

Without hesitation he threw the phone down. He was out the front door not even bothering with his parka.

The wind-driven raindrops stung his face like bee-bees. Somebody else had known the details of all five killings.

Christine LeFey.

And right now she was with Lucy.

X

SHAYNE SLAMMED THE BUICK INTO *DRIVE* AND MASHED the pedal to the wet floor. The car fishtailed away from the curb. Not half a block down the street, he slid to a stop to avoid a fallen palm. The engine died.

"Come on, dammit," he shouted as he ground the ignition. The motor coughed to a start.

He whipped the car around and headed in the opposite direction. No time to lose.

As he approached the other end of Breck, he saw blue lights swirling amidst a sea of bodies. A three-car wreck. The intersection was completely blocked.

Jerking the steering wheel to the left, he plowed through the nearest yard. The Buick's wheels churned, spitting sand and sod as it soared between two ranchstyles, through a once well-landscaped backyard, and onto the adjoining street.

He sped north up the Dixie Highway back to I-95. If anything, the interstate looked more storm-ravaged. Acid spilled into his gut. He had

been the one to suggest, no, to insist Lucy stay with Christine LeFey. Maybe Freed was right—the wrong ones were running the asylums.

The name behind the TV set, the bottle of lithium. She had lied. The prescription was for her only. He'd bet, too, that the C. LeFey to whom the Toyota was registered stood for Christine, not Christopher.

Every time Christopher had run out of their duplex apartment after having one of his visions, she had been left alone. Had she, too, gone out?

He turned east on 395. As he drew closer to Lucy's, he could see the turbulence in the bay. Giant waves beat against the sand. Everything was grey-white, and shapes were difficult to distinguish. He felt trapped in a nightmare not of his own making. No matter how hard he pushed the Buick, he seemed to be travelling in slow motion.

He hurtled off the exit ramp at Biscayne Boulevard and headed toward 11th. Dodging a stalled beer truck, he turned the corner, then swerved to avoid a concrete bus bench that had been relocated to the middle of the street.

Before he could bring the Buick's slide to a stop, he jumped the curb in front of Lucy's apartment. He didn't bother to park between the lines.

His fingers slapped the call buttons indiscriminately. He heard a buzz. Then from behind him an explosion. One of Florida Power's transformers on the pole in front of the apartment burst into flames and burned like a funeral pyre.

Shayne bolted up the steps to the second floor. Unceremoniously he shouldered open the door to Lucy's apartment.

Across the gray run the tableau seemed momentarily frozen.

On the overstuffed couch lay a motionless Lucy Hamilton. Her eyes were closed, her face pale and silent. Directly behind her at the edge of the dining room stood Christine LeFey. In her hand was a large carving knife.

Her eyes swiveled toward Shayne in surprise.

He crossed the carpet and vaulted the couch.

Christine LeFey's body turned, the knife trailing her motion.

Shayne's meaty fist flew toward her. The force of the blow dropped the frail figure instantly.

LUCY HAMILTON SUDDENLY SAT UP. RELIEF AND SHOCK flooded over the redhead.

"Michael," said his secretary, rubbing her eyes, "when did you get here?"

"Lucy," he stammered, "I thought . . ."

"You can have dinner with us. It'll be nice to have a man around in

this storm. Does Christine have the roast ready?"

"Roast?" he said, his nostrils picking up the scent from the oven.

"Yes. I was really feeling tired after last night, and she said she'd fix dinner so I could lie down for a while. I guess I just dozed off."

A moan from the back of the couch drew Lucy's attention. She peered over the back to the floor. "Christine," she yelled as she hurried around the couch to the prostrate figure. "What happened?"

"Well," said the detective, "I came into the room . . . I thought . . . well, she had this knife and . . ."

"Michael, you didn't think that Christine had used that knife to . . . how could you?"

"Lucy," said Shayne as he helped his secretary carry the still-groggy Christine to the couch, "this case has gotten out of hand. Nothing is what it appears to be. I don't know what to believe. I tried reason. It didn't work, and now my instincts seem to be screwed up."

Outside the storm howled. "You're not alone. Everything seems to be out of kilter. The phone went dead, then it rings, and there's nobody there. The lights have been flickering on and off as if they have a life of their own. Every time the power goes out, the digital clocks go off, so I don't know what time it is. The radio is total static."

Lucy got an ice-pack and applied it to Christine LeFey's already-swelling chin. "Easy now," she said as the tiny blonde started to come around.

Christine's eyes opened. Looking directly at Shayne, she said, "Christopher's left the hospital, hasn't he?"

Shayne glanced at his watch. It was almost six. He must have dozed off at the LeFey's longer than he had thought. "Six hours ago," he said.

"He needs our help," said the blonde.

"And I need your help," said the detective. "I just put together all the pieces and came up with the wrong solution. Tell me what happened between your father and mother forty years ago just before you were born."

Her face grew puzzled, and then her eyes closed. "During World War II my mother was a nurse in San Francisco. She met Captain John MacLean. They had a typical war whirlwind romance and were married. Three months later he was shipped out to the Pacific. You want the whole story?"

Shayne nodded.

"A month later," continued the blonde, "she was transferred to an internment center for Japanese-Americans in Kansas. While she was there, one of her patients was a Japanese-American businessman."

"Named Tange."

"How did you know that?" said Christine.

"I saw a picture in your apartment."

"Oh. Somehow he and mother fell in love. Who understands anything in wartime? Mother felt guilty about their relationship we were told. She wrote MacLean a letter explaining what had happened. Right after that she found out she was pregnant. She wrote another letter to the Pacific, explaining to Captain MacLean that he was the father. He denied it. He wouldn't come home and started volunteering for every dangerous mission as if he wanted to die."

Shayne could understand. It must have been difficult to fight at Iwo Jima and the like against the Japanese and then discover that your new bride was in love with one of them on the home front. "What happened to him?"

"The Army discovered he was making death threats to mother. When she died in childbirth, he totally broke down. They committed him to a hospital. When the war ended, Tange moved back with his relatives to Los Angeles, and he raised us as if we were his own. Then two years later he died. His family kicked us out, for we weren't Japanese or in any way legally related to them. Christopher and I were left alone."

"That's when all the foster homes began," said Shayne.

"Yes. For years Christopher and I were separated. Then in our teens we were finally reunited. Mother's sister told us the whole story of our mother and Captain MacLean. She even gave us those pictures. Until then, we had believed we were Tange's children and couldn't figure out why his family hadn't wanted us. We began to search for our real father. We finally found him living at a V.A. hospital near Seattle. Whenever we visited him, though, he stared at us as if we were just pieces of furniture. My brother and I moved to Seattle, and for years we tried to communicate, but even after he recovered some of his faculties, he refused to acknowledge us as his children. Finally we gave up and moved as far away as we could. We came to Miami, changed our names, and started a new life."

"That's an interesting story," said Lucy, "but why are you so concerned about the past now, Michael?"

"Christopher hasn't always had visions, has he?" said Shayne to the blonde.

"No. They started a year ago."

"About the time Christopher was arrested in Flamingo Park," said Shayne.

"That was his first one," Christine answered. "We were strolling

. . . how did you know?"

"I didn't *know*," said the detective. "Do you have any idea why they started then?"

"All I can remember is that the first vision was of father. We were standing next to that metal sculpture when Christopher suddenly fell to his knees in the grips of a vision. He began screaming in two distinct voices. The people around us got nervous. Somebody called the police. We weren't doing . . ."

"You two hang on," said Shayne. And before they could say anything, he had vanished out of the front door.

WHEN SHAYNE RETURNED, HE WAS SOAKING WET. HE walked over to the sink and began to wring out his sports coat. Lucy handed him a snifter of brandy. "What was that all about?"

"You told me your phone wasn't working," he answered. "The Buick's was."

"Why did you make a call?" said his secretary.

"I had to call Caron."

"Michael," she protested.

The detective tossed down the warm brandy. "She called the Pentagon and turned up an interesting detail. Thirteen months ago the V.A. hospital in Seattle, Washington, discharged one Captain John I. MacLean."

"Synchronicity," said Christine LeFey.

"What's that?" said Lucy.

The blonde answered, "It's the term our psychologist, Dr. Freed, uses to explain two independent actions that occur at the same time."

"It's a fancy word for coincidence," said Shayne.

"Dr. Freed has pointed out on many occasions that the very fact Christopher and I are twins, as are thousands of others, indicates that synchronistic events occur with more regularity than people want to admit."

"That's fascinating," said Lucy.

Shayne fixed the blonde in his steel-gray eyes. "Then if Christopher saw your father . . . Christine, do you think you could have a vision now?"

"You mean, force it?"

"Yes."

"I've never . . ."

"You force yourself to do other things all the time. Why not a vision?"

She hesitated. "It's just that I . . . well, I've never done it before."

"Try it."

"Why now?"

"Your brother's out there—somewhere," said the detective. "You yourself said he needed our help, and call it a gift, but I've got a bad feeling about all this."

She sat down in the chair opposite Lucy's couch. "Christopher's visions always seem to come when he's relaxed."

"Slow down your breathing," said Shayne. "Try to inhale slowly for about ten seconds. Take the same amount of time to exhale."

Christine followed the redhead's advice. Within a short time her respiratory cycles were longer. Her body began to quiver. Then her lips trembled. She started to speak in a voice that wasn't quite hers. "I see lots of dark water . . . high waves . . . it's a pier . . . Christopher is standing there . . . the wind is fierce . . . someone else is coming . . . oh, NO! . . . the knife."

Suddenly Christine LeFey collapsed in her chair.

ALL THE WAY UP I-95 SHAYNE FELT LIKE A KITE THAT HAD lost its tail. Tempestuous winds belted the Buick, knocking it between the right guardrail and the left. At this time of night he was accustomed to seeing billboards, towers, and streetlights, all well lit, outlining the highway, but this evening he drove through the dark maze depending on his memory and reactions.

Above North Miami Beach he turned off. At the end of the exit ramp, something smashed into the right door as if launched from a bazooka. Then the Buick skipped over an object in the road, and the right headlight popped out.

The hell of it was the whole trip was nothing but a guess. What other choice did he have? Time was running out. Christine's second vision, unlike that of Planet Ocean, was so indistinct. Only a pier. How could he pin it down? Between Key West and Palm Beach perhaps a hundred of them jutted into the Atlantic.

With all the rules thrown out, he had made up his own. The Greater Miami phone book listed one Freed, Nathan, M.D. He lived between North Miami Beach and Hallandale on a street address that suggested oceanfront.

And somewhere in the area Shayne recalled a pier.

Christopher LeFey hadn't gone to his duplex apartment, so his psychologist seemed a possible alternative.

Somebody at that pier, Christine's visions had told the redhead, was in danger. And somewhere in the midst of all the chaos and darkness he had found a tenuous thread that stitched together the five so-called

serial killings.

Unfortunately he wasn't as familiar with the North Miami area as he would have liked. His eyes pierced the darkness for Route 1, and when he found it, he turned north.

The narrower streets were littered with cars and other debris, forcing him to proceed ever so slowly.

Suddenly he saw something coming toward him from out of the dark night. A shapeless mass, it struck the Buick head on. Shayne's head snapped forward, and hot steam hissed at him from the ruptured radiator.

Shayne jumped out of the car. He tried to jog, but the wind wouldn't let him. His only progress came when the mindless gusts suddenly shifted direction and blew him forward.

The ocean's low roar told him where east was. He kept moving, grabbing at anything stationary he could find for support. His mind latched on to Lucy, temporarily safer within that old building that had been built long ago to withstand such an assault from nature.

From out of the night a giant shape appeared on the beach. Like a huge spider the pier on its thin pylons stretched into the turbulent sea.

He groped toward it.

As he fought his way onto the concrete and wood structure, Shayne could barely make out three figures at the opposite end of the pier. Through the almost horizontal rainfall, he watched as the distant human shapes performed a macabre ballet. His hands on the wooden rail, he inched toward them. When the force of the gale grew stronger, he began to crawl against it.

One figure seemed to be driving the other two toward the railing. The carnivorous, white-frothed waves licked the pier in anticipation.

Shayne drew ever closer. The two retreating figures became discernible. Freed and Christopher LeFey.

A knife slashed the night air. Within ten feet Shayne could tell the weapon was in reality a bayonet.

"Freeze!" the detective shouted as he reached in the small of his back for the .38.

Nobody could hear him over the crash of the waves.

Shayne fired in the air twice. The bayonet-wielding figure turned momentarily.

Despite the wind-blown white hair and the wild, wide-open eyes, Shayne recognized the older face. Leveling the barrel, the detective barked, "Hold it, MacLean!"

Behind the killer Freed and Christopher LeFey saw their chance and rushed for freedom.

They never made it.

A huge wave rose up from the blackness and struck the pier broadside. The three men froze and screamed, but their cries were smothered by the water.

Shayne lunged for the railing.

Sea water rushed around him, trying to tear his hands from the security of the wooden support.

Then as suddenly as it had come, it was gone. When Shayne wiped the salty spray from his eyes, he was alone on the pier. He looked into the swirling water, but he knew there was no hope.

THE STORM HAD DISAPPEARED. SHAYNE SAT ON THE edge of the pier dangling his feet in the empty space.

"That's a hell of a tale," said Caron Thurman from behind him.

"Trailing his children to Miami, killing every one they came in contact with who had even the slightest relation to anything Japanese."

Shayne stared out to the horizon where a pin-prick of light was starting to appear. "I know how crazy it seems, but remember what Freed said about the motivation of serial killers. MacLean hated the Japanese—the war, his wife's infidelity with the enemy. Think of him like one of those Japanese soldiers who have been turning up on South Pacific islands still nurturing after all the years a hatred of Americans. MacLean's jungle was his mind, and his war wasn't over. When he saw Christopher and Christine, whom he believed were products of his wife's affair with Tange, driving a Japanese car, owning a Japanese television set . . ."

"Gail Jeffries, victim #4, had on a rising sun t-shirt. Jon Harris performed that Japanese transvestite number at the Switching Post. The guy at Planet Ocean was a Japanese exchange student." Caron Thurman placed her hand on Shayne's shoulder. "Damn! Eight meaningless deaths."

"Nine," said Shayne flatly. "When Christine LeFey finds out what has happened, I don't think there'll be enough lithium pills on the planet to help her."

"You know, Mike, you could have fooled me," Caron mused, "but the NHC said the winds never reached hurricane velocity."

"The hell of it for me was I couldn't do a thing. Do you realize that even if I didn't exist, last night's ending to the whole thing would have been exactly the same?"

"Don't be so down." The female cop looked out toward the red glow starting to spread over the horizon. "You know what I see out there?"

"Yeah," said Shayne, "somewhere a depression called Tropical Storm Bertha is starting to form."

With great effort the redhead stood up. Caron Thurman took him by the hand. "Come on. I'll buy you breakfast. What do you want?"

"Anything," he said. "Anything as long as you can drink it from a snifter."

FIRST WORDS

What is the first word common to each set of movie titles?

- | | |
|---------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. ____ CROSSING | ____ FEMALE |
| ____ MONEY | ____ MISSION |
| 2. ____ GANGSTER | ____ MAN TO HANG |
| ____ MILE | ____ RIDE |
| 3. ____ CORNER | ____ INTRUDER |
| ____ ALIBI | ____ BAIT |
| 4. ____ HENCHMEN | ____ CARGO |
| ____ CANYON | ____ BAIT |
| 5. ____ SPY | ____ THAT STALKED NEW YORK |
| ____ McCOY | ____ IS LOOSE |
| 6. ____ RINGER | ____ MAN'S EYES |
| ____ END | ____ RECKONING |
| 7. ____ ON APPROVAL | ____ OVER NEW YORK |
| ____ ON MONDAY | ____ BY CONTRACT |

ANSWERS

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|--------------|---------|---------|------------|-----------|---------|-----------|
| 1. DANGEROUS | 2. LAST | 3. DARK | 4. DEVIL'S | 5. KILLER | 6. DEAD | 7. MURDER |
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Did she or didn't she? Only her murderer knew for sure!

The Corpse With Hair Like Veronica Lake

by JERRY JACOBSON

THE POLICE BOAT WAS SCUDDING BACK AND FORTH across the quiet lake. The two men hunched over the stern were operating drag lines. Sighting through the telescopic device on his camera set up on the rear deck of his rented bungalow, Evans could make out the squat form of LeDuc. The day was still hot and LeDuc was sipping a beer to cool off as he stood over the two men with the drag lines. A cop in his shirt sleeves, quaffing a lager on a hot summer day at the lake. It would have made an idyllic oil painting were it not for the fact he was looking for a body.

From time to time police divers in black wetsuits popped to the water's surface. They would swim with strong strokes to another spot in the pre-arranged grid pattern and then disappear in another dive. Evans counted four of them. LeDuc's suspicions were sky-high and so he was sparing no expense. He knew Lake Kacheen had as its receptacle a volcanic crater with unseen ledges and troughs, but the detective was giving it his best shots.

Evans gave up his distant vigil a minute and went back inside the bungalow. He had a bit of scotch cooled and softened in a fistful of ice cubes and allowed his brain to play in the reflections of Cassandra Deschanes. She had been a little bit of a mystery woman all along and a lot of mysterious women came to bad ends.

THEY HAD MET AT OLD JOSH MAYERLINK'S GENERAL store down in Lake Kacheen's dusty, indolent shopping village. She was buying her thrice-weekly staples for herself and her husband, in addition to zinc oxide suntan cream, some stylish Italian sunglasses, two cases of liquor and mixers and sports magazines and cigars for the man in her life. Her honey-blond hair fell down across her right eye and she swept it aside from time to time with her right hand as she spoke or moved about the store. Peekaboo was the term for that style, a pure resurrection from a past not even Evans could clearly recall. A sultry, smoky movie actress from the forties named Veronica Lake had started the fashion. Young women across the country copied it and during World War II the government even asked the actress not to wear her hair that way because hundreds of female war-workers were getting their hair caught in factory machinery. Veronica Lake had been dead over a decade now. Acute hepatitis, Evans thought, but he couldn't be sure. And now, floating up through time, here she was again, gliding around an old general store picking out canned peaches and baby shampoo and laundry bleach and whisking the cascade of hair aside with her free right hand.

Mayerlink had introduced them. Her smile verged on sincerity but never quite crossed over completely.

"West Road, Mr. Evans?"

"No, East." There had been a little apology in Evans' tone. Out there, miles from the civilized world, there was still a rich side of town and a poor side of town.

She told him to stop by for drinks sometime, but he knew the invitation to be obligatory, like "doing lunch" in the city. And then, with another brush of that hair with her right hand, she was out the front door and into the white Jaguar parked in plain view. A gang of

summer kids in cut-offs and Little League baseball caps scattered. Cassandra Deschanes gave the curtain of blonde hair one more parting with her right hand, which had now become ingrained habit, revved the Jag's engine once and then drove off amid swirls and wisps of summer dust.

"That hair over her right eye like that," Josh Mayerlink had commented. "I knew an old movie actress wore her hair like that."

"Veronica Lake," Evans said.

"Surprised a young fella like yourself would know anything about her."

"Late-late movies on teevee. She could melt Alan Ladd's pistol with a single look. Right down to the shell casings."

"The Deschanes are the West Road crowd. Private tennis courts, hot tubs, patio decks big enough to qualify for statehood. Deschanes was big in the unions, you know."

Evans knew. He was a newspaper reporter. Right now he was suffering a little burn-out and on sabbatical for his own good health and sanity; but he knew about Anthony Deschanes.

Union goon, shop steward, local president, international vice-president. Deschanes had mugged and slugged and intimidated his way to the top in a very short period of time. Eventually, he gained control of his union's regional pension fund.

But he'd made too many interest-free loans to too many people of unsavory character, even wiping some of the bad loans from the union's books for the price of a kick-back or two.

Finally, the federal government moved in. They failed to draw any indictments against Deschanes. But they had a finger on his house of cards, which forced him to turn in his union card and to promise not to seek any union office in the future. The possibility of future indictment became the hovering blade. Justice delayed became justice served.

"That one's the second Mrs. Deschanes," said Josh Mayerlink now, halting Evans' reveries. "The first one left him over all that union business, the scandal and all. Pamela, I think her name was. It was in all the papers. This wife he married just after that. About seven years ago, I guess it would be. She worked in the union office. Birds of a feather. And she had that sexy look with her hair falling down that way and all."

What had they called Veronica Lake? *The sex zombie*. She'd been quoted as saying she'd never liked acting all that much. But then, she'd never been given much good acting to do. She'd gotten stuck in the deepest of ruts playing gun molls and cafe seductresses.

"That camera film you ordered come in yesterday," Mayerlink said

to Thom Evans. "It'll just take me a few minutes to put up the rest of your order . . ."

"No hurry, Josh." Evans smiled to himself as he thought of how the world's business was conducted. People like Anthony Deschanes would always be in line to order first or see their orders delivered, or ready and waiting. And people like Evans, the ordinary decent souls of the world, their lot would be the next taxi, the table by the kitchen and "just a few minutes more." And ever would it be.

"EVER IT SHALL BE, TOMMYGUN. THE MEEK MAY INHERIT the earth, but people like Anthony Deschanes will still hold due its taxes, its mortgages and its union dues."

The girl, Beatty Cook, was standing on Evans' rickety patio and looking out at Lake Kacheen as darkness began to turn it into some forbidding lagoon, crystalline and quiet. She was visiting and checking in on the state of Evans' occupational burn-out. As a part of his self-administered therapy, he was taking a run at writing a mystery thriller and telephotographing species of ducks and geese and what he thought were Chesapeake herons, miles off their beaten paths and building nests in the old sycamores that spiked the lower hills around the lake. The girl came by twice each week just to make sure his baskets weren't out of weave.

"So you met her in the village. What is the second Mrs. Deschanes like?"

"She buys canned artchoke hearts, expensive zinc sun cream and Sumatran coffee beans on order."

"So she's a conspicuous consumer. I asked you what she was *like*."

"Like Veronica Lake," Evans said finally. He was across the living room wrestling with a four-day-old Sunday New York *Times* as though he were in the ring with it. He already had a three-inch stack of ad inserts and veterans' insurance brochures that didn't have anything to do with newspapers.

"The old movie actress?" said Beatty Cook.

"The blonde hair down over the right eye and everything. Young, polite, skin like milk coming from a bottle."

"Young? Anthony Deschanes must be over fifty."

"Every older man should have a crack at one nymphlet before he shuffles off to Buffalo," Evans said back. "Including me."

"And they've been married seven years and haven't been up to their lake house until this summer?"

"No crime to let a boat and a summer house stand idle. After all, that's why they're called the idle rich."

"No crime, no. But it's still a little out of the ordinary staying away from such a nice, quiet retreat like Lake Kacheen for seven years. And seven years, isn't that the length of the statutes of limitations for every crime except murder?"

"Why didn't you *say* you wanted to play Trivial Pursuit? I'll get the board out."

"Sorry, Tommygun. Just practicing up on my stream of suspiciousness. Anyway, it must be kind of a kick to have a man of sullied character for a neighbor."

"He's not a neighbor, Beatty. He lives a half-mile away across a lake. A neighbor is somebody who lives next door and loans you cups of sugar and garden rakes."

"Next door, across a lake . . . same-o, same-o," Beatty Cook said, surprising Evans' a little with the gambler's lingo. "You've got a telephoto lens on this camera. Talk about your James Stewart in *Rear Window*."

"Beatty, I spy on ducks, birds and geese. And now maybe a few Chesapeake herons whose leader has a rotten sense of direction. But I don't spy on people."

The girl was sighting through the lens, which was set, camera and all, on a sturdy tripod and aimed out at the lake. Not that there was much left for her to see now. The sun had plunged to below the treetops now, leaving visible only brooding silhouettes. "In daylight," she was saying, "you can probably make out everything across the lake. The boat, the dock, the Deschanes' rear yard, even the deck up at the house. And if you had stronger magnification, Tommygun, you could probably sight in through the kitchen window and read the label on their catsup bottle. There's lights on in the kitchen and dining room."

Evans' found the sports section and went in search of his Cubbies. They hadn't won a baseball pennant in four decades, but this year they were contending. Williams, Banks and Santo would be proud.

"Thom, I can just barely make out figures of people moving about in the kitchen."

The Cubs could always play long-ball. It was the pitching that always did them in. "They're probably getting set to sit down to have a little catsup," he told the girl.

"YOU WANT CATSUP ON YOUR EGGS?" SHOUTED THE voice from the kitchen.

"I think I'm out," Evans yelled back, grinning a little as he stepped from his morning shower and began to towel off. "Why don't you swim across the lake and borrow some from our neighbors!"

The girl had already called her school, faked illness and asked them to bring in her substitute. She taught summer courses at one of the city's core high schools. English Composition and Remedial Reading. She taught at the same school during the regular sessions as well, but the extra income helped hike her wage up above the poverty level.

But teaching five days a week in the summer at an inner-city high school brought burn-out to her as well. In the winter, teaching was a tolerable occupation. It had its own constant rhythm and pace. Teaching moved unalterably forward like a cruising ship; the slow-learners fell overboard and were left like debris in the wake of the able and the competent. But in the summer, teaching was an excruciating ordeal, because all your students were slow, the unpassed unfortunates and the dunces and the delinquents. And all your students had to be taught and teaching them was like trying to make progress against a fierce and powerful tide. "My little dreggies," Beatty Cook called her students because they were the dregs, the ones who would fail at school, fail at marriage, fail in the workplace and fail as positive contributors to the human family. And that eventually caused an overload of frustration and anger and pity and sadness for her "little couch potatoes."

They were two burned-out humans and now escaped from the kitchen until they could catch fire once more. They were incredibly right for each other, even as battle casualties.

"I think I'll take a drive around the lake after breakfast," she announced to Evans as they were eating.

"Like Thoreau bumming around Walden Pond and thinking up great notions?"

"I've got to think about my dreggies and decide if I want to go back. They make me so blue sometimes, Tommygun. They laugh in all the wrong places and they sneer at their lives as they watch them slipping away right before their eyes. They just won't let anyone through to them. Half of them will end up in prisons. And the other half will go to Hollywood to get into the movies. They won't have two dimes to keep shiny and they'll end up on the Sunset Strip and they'll get into films all right, where your fans sit in little booths with fistfuls of quarters and every hour an attendant comes by to spray the little booths with disinfectant."

"Hooray for Hollywood," Evans said.

"So I've got to get off and think whether I can stand all that heartbreak in my life."

Evans wasn't going to tell her the world would always have its victims, its dreggies. She already knew that and accepted it. She needed

other, deeper answers. She needed to drive or hike her head off and maybe even cry it off, too, before she could expect answers.

After she left the house, Evans toiled at his thriller. He wanted to introduce a subplot, but he didn't have one. He sought a truly unique way to dispose of a body, but he was beginning to think the last original way had just been thought of by somebody else. He needed to call up Josh Mayerlink at the village store and order a dozen red herrings.

At ten-thirty his phone rang. It was Beatty and her voice held an odd turn to it. Evans read it as an amalgam of stark terror and total disbelief.

"Thom, I'm over at the Deschanes house. I'm with Cassandra Deschanes, trying to settle her down. Hell, I'm trying to settle us *both* down."

"Settle yourself down from what?"

"From nearly being killed."

"YOU WERE NEARLY KILLED?"

Thom Evans' question went out across the Deschanes living room to the two women who sat at opposite ends of a Queen Anne couch. They held drinks as calmatives; or merely something to hold onto.

It was Beatty Cook who spoke first. "I drove to the other side of the lake. I mean, *this* side. Just driving and thinking, not really paying too much attention to the landscape or anything else. I found myself on Serpentine Road. It's a stretch of two-lane that winds up above the lake just north of the village."

Cassandra Deschanes found her voice. She swept the fall of hair aside with her right hand. "Serpentine bypasses a dangerous slide area. The roadway rises about a thousand feet and then falls back as it approaches the village."

"I was coming down the descending side," Beatty Cook continued. "I happened to glance into my rear view mirror and all of a sudden there's this metallic-grey BMW 730i and it's moving like it's just been shot out of a cannon."

"I'm honking my horn and yelling blue, bloody murder."

"I can't make out much of what Mrs. Deschanes is yelling, but it crossed my mind that maybe her brakes went out. Then, the BMW begins bumping me from behind, but I'm driving good old Tank the Buick, or we're *both* off the road and into the lake six hundred feet straight down . . ."

"My brakes *did* go out," Cassandra Deschanes confirmed, again combing the hair from her eye with her right hand while taking a gulp of her drink with the left. "Wildeberry Road is coming up on the right

and it branches off up a short knoll and then onto level ground. There's nothing I can do but pray Beatty has her wits about her and spots it in time to swing onto it."

"I've got us slowed to around forty-five and I'm fielding the nudges all right . . ."

" . . . I haven't any brake pedal at all . . ."

" . . . then I see the road angling away from the cliff and the lake . . ."

"I mean, no brake pedal *at all*," said Cassandra Deschanes. "How can that happen with a brand new BMW?"

"I've got her slowed enough now so she can make the curve up onto Wildeberry. We both make it over the knoll and after a few more nudges, I brake us both to a stop on the gravel shoulder. That's where we both have our nervous breakdowns."

The terror of the ordeal was draining from their systems. Talking it out had the same therapeutic effect as talking out a bad dream.

"Where is the car now?" Evans asked.

"Still up on Wildeberry Road," said Cassandra Deschanes. "We jammed some boulders under the wheels. Old Josh down at the village store has a garage where he does a little repair work. But he has no tow truck."

"The car's a BMW, did you say?" Evans asked.

"Yes."

"The car I saw you drive off in when we met in the village was an XKE."

"Yes. The Jaguar is mine. The BMW belongs to my husband."

"Do the two of you trade automobiles all the time?" Evans asked.

"Not with any regularity, but it's happened. This morning Tony had a date to play Pickle Ball in Roche Harbor with a former union crony. He took my car because it was blocking his in the garage and I was still in bed."

Evans asked her about Pickle Ball.

"It's a little like tennis. Smaller court, wooden paddles and a plastic ball about the size of a softball. Like squash is handball for people who don't like to run, Pickle Ball is tennis without all the fatigue. Tony has money invested in its development, I think."

"So if the brakes on that BMW turn out to be tampered with, then it could be that someone wants your husband dead."

"Union bosses always tend to make more enemies than friends," said Cassandra Deschanes. "Disgruntled members, adversaries beaten in union elections, union-breaking company owners. The list tends to grow to be pretty long."

"Well," said Evans, "you should call in the police, at least to have the incident down on the record."

"What police? The Kacheen County sheriff's office is over fifty miles away. The only time any of those deputies ever come over here is to take all the fish out of the lake."

"Well, at least have the car taken down to the village and let Josh take a look at it," Beatty Cook said.

"And then again," hedged Cassandra Deschanes, "maybe we shouldn't be making so much of this. Brakes on new automobiles fail. All the eggs chickens make aren't perfect and all the cars the Brits make aren't perfectly infallible machines."

Evans wasn't going to make the mistake of making too much of it either. He and the Deschanes were still close to absolute strangers. Living at the shores of the same lake didn't make them instant friends the same way hot water and a packet of ingredients made instant soup; and neither did it have them spinning in the same social orbit.

Beatty Cook seemed to want to make more of it; she just had that buttinski look on her face.

But what interrupted was the sound of a car driving up to the house. Its engine had the torque and roar of a sports car, one that jogged Evans' memory bank. The engine went silent; very audibly Evans heard the solid thunk of a well-made car door slamming shut, then heavy steps echoing on the parquet hallway floor. And then the thickly set man standing in the entrance to the Deschanes living room, a black cigar in his mouth the size of a boat oar. And it might have been illusion on Evans' part, but it was his gut feeling that Anthony Deschanes had entered a room where all was not as he expected it would be, as though all his furniture had been rearranged. As though his expectations had not been met.

"DID YOU SEE THE EXPRESSION ON HIS FACE, TOMMY-GUN? It's like she rearranged all the furniture without telling him."

They were back on their own side of the lake. Evans was grinding Sumatran beans for coffee and the girl was watching to see if he knew what he was doing.

"And the conversation. It was so lame, I wanted to go out and buy it a crutch. He couldn't get us out of that house fast enough."

"Well, he didn't expect us to be there," Evans said.

"Us? He didn't expect *his wife* to be there. I saw the way he looked at her when he came into the room."

"Like she wasn't suppose to be there."

"Tommygun, I think he rigged the brakes on the BMW and arranged

it so his wife would be left with it to drive."

"He wants his wife dead then."

"Like last week's news," said Beatty Cook. "And he has a motive. We just don't know what it is. And I'll tell you what else stinks, Tommygun. First summer in seven years of marriage he brings her up to the lake. Isolation, seclusion, no witnesses . . . no pain, no strain."

The phone rang while they were talking. The girl answered it, listened more than she spoke and put up the receiver with her lips pursed and twisted just a little, like a sidewalk crack.

"It was Cassandra Deschanes. Her husband went out to look at the car. And to figure out a way to get it down Serpentine Road and into the village without brakes."

"Sounds a little like she wants to reassure you she's alone in the house and not being overheard."

"That's just the impression I got too, Tommygun."

"What else did she have to say?"

"She said that her husband told her he'd been invited to Roche Harbor by his investment partner, Frank Sterns, to play Pickle Ball. Sterns was going to show the court and demonstrate the game to some potential buyers and Sterns felt her husband should be there to lend his influence."

"So Mrs. Deschanes decided to verify that story with Frank Sterns," said Evans.

"It wasn't Sterns who made the appointment, it was her husband. They just batted the ball around for a few hours, drank whisky and shot the breeze."

"And Cassandra Deschanes suspects her husband wanted a reason to be absent and miles away from home when the brakes failed on that BMW."

"Not a reason, an alibi. But that's just the half. She also told me she felt there was something very odd in the way her husband showed up at the house."

"How so?"

"Only that it was the first time in *eight years* he didn't announce himself with a 'Hi, honey, I'm home' or some variation."

"As though he expected no one would be there," said Evans.

"As though he'd expected his brakes-tampering worked, the BMW had sailed off a cliff and into the lake with his wife in it, so why holler hello to an empty house."

They continued to talk and surmise about these strange events while Evans finished grinding the coffee beans a second time to expose more

bean-particle surfaces. Then three minutes of brewing-time in the expresso machine. They drank it on the deck while from time to time the girl sighted through the camera's lens aimed out at the lake.

"Tommygun," the girl said at one point. "She's scared. She couldn't tell me why, but she's good and scared."

"She thinks her husband is trying to kill her," Evans said.

"And that maybe he'll try again," Beatty Cook answered as she continued sighting off and on through the telescopic lens until her coffee was gone.

EVANS WAS FRAMING THE ACTION OUT ON THE LAKE. THE speedboat made another pass less than a hundred yards away and he captured six quick shots of its driver, Anthony Deschanes, and then six more of his wife being towed from behind and carving sweeping arcs on a single water ski.

"He's waiting for her to fall," said the female voice behind Evans. "He wants her helpless in the water so he can swing the boat back around and create a tragic accident."

"Then he's got a long wait," Evans said back. "She's an expert skier."

"Then he'll wait. Wait for the one-in-a-million fluke, like with the car brakes. No clean cut of the lines, just a little artful tampering."

Beatty Cook was remaining at the lake. She'd called her school board and told them her pesky little cold had grown into a hard-hitting virus and that she would be out indefinitely. It was the first time in Evans' memory he could recall her ever lying.

She had exchanged phone numbers with Cassandra Deschanes and written the Deschanes' down on Evans' note pad next to the wall phone in the kitchen.

"Josh Mayerlink checked out that BMW," Beatty Cook said to Evans. "He found a puncture in the brake line and a considerable loss of brake fluid."

"Enough to make the brakes inoperable?"

"Enough."

"Of course," said Evans, "that puncture *could have been* made by road debris."

"And it *could have been* made by an ice pack."

"You say ice pick and I say road debris . . . you say tomato and I say to-maa-to . . ."

"Very funny. Only attempted murder isn't a laughing matter, Tommygun."

"The *appearance* of attempted murder. Just keep in mind an ancient

truism about appearance and reality: 'the observer brings with him a good portion of what he thinks he sees.' Just keep in mind that illusion and reality like to wear each other's hats. It's been three days now since that accident up on Serpentine Road. What does Cassandra Deschanes have to say about it? Does she still think her husband is trying to murder her?"

"She isn't sure," Beatty Cook said. "But if there's a snowball's chance, she wants to make sure someone else knows about her suspicions."

"Well, she's skiing her head off out there," Evans said. "That doesn't look to me like a woman who's afraid for her life."

"No, it doesn't," the girl admitted.

"Are *you* afraid for her life?"

"I'm not so sure, either. I mean, maybe they're just having, you know, squabbles. That's a family affair. Sure, I saved her life, but that doesn't make us blood sisters. She has my number in the city. She knows she can call whenever she wants. But I'm still the poor, ghetto school teacher and she's the wife of a wealthy former union boss who's maybe broken the law by ratholing a fortune. Our social orbits don't exactly conjunct."

IN THE MORNING BEATTY LEFT. THE DREGGIES WERE SITTING at the back of her brain and crying out for help. Evans helped pour her luggage into the trunk of the old Buick. The rear bumper was smashed against the molding and Evans had to toe down the trunk's lid with a length of rope.

"Watch them, Tommygun," the girl said as she climbed in behind the wheel. "There's no law against watching other people. If they have their clothes on and they aren't locked in sweating sex. Anthony Deschanes is still one bird I'm not convinced is on the up-and-up."

"I'll keep my eyes open."

"And wipe a tear from your eye every so often so I know you love me."

"You got it, kid."

"You lie like a blanket, Tommygun. See ya'."

Evans' amateur status had gone by the boards now and he knew it. He had promoted himself from the ranks of the idly curious to the echelon of spies.

EVERY MONDAY, WEDNESDAY AND FRIDAY, CASSANDRA Deschanes went off to play tennis. They had no private court of their own and that might have been because the first Mrs. Anthony

Deschanes had detested sports of every kind with an unqualified passion. But there were private tennis courts scattered throughout the hidden hills above the lake. It was a simple matter of whom you knew.

At nine a.m. sharp on these days, Cassandra Deschanes would bound from the house with the oversized, light-blue athletic bag slung from her left shoulder and the right hand constantly sweeping away the fall of blonde hair from the right side of her face. Her rackets, enough to outfit an entire team for the Davis Cup, were stored in a little sleeve fashioned on the outside of the bag. Evans wondered if she pinned the hair back when she played; or invoked a special rule that allowed her opponents to return the ball to the left side of the court only.

Evans began photographing them singly and together: he snapped them taking meals on the patio deck, playing card games and chatting around the sun-table, swimming in the pool, sunbathing side by side on chaise longues on the grass. If Anthony Deschanes had murder in his dark heart and on his mind, it didn't show.

Deschanes' routine was less active. He tended his gardens, he jogged the lake roads, he sunned himself, he read books by the pool. He ate massive, barbecued suppers on the patio. Evans would have liked some recognizable pictures of them inside the house; but without a stronger magnification lens, he got only anonymous shapes in repose and movement beyond the glass.

Once two men came to the house. Both were dressed in dark, stiff, uninspiring suits. Cassandra Deschanes served the men drinks at the suntable and then was banished from the meeting by her husband. The threesome talked and Deschanes read through some papers assiduously and signed them. The two men reclaimed the papers, finished their drinks and then went away.

Union men. Nobody else Evans knew wore red neckties with dark blue suits. He took some photos, hoping that the magic of enlargement photography could give identity to their faces. If they proved to be union men, then Anthony Deschanes was in graphic violation of state and federal agreements.

THE NEXT MONDAY EVANS TOOK HIS PHOTOS INTO THE city. He turned them over to the best photographic artist he knew, a finicky former *life* photo-journalist named Dutch VanRokken, who collected Pulitzer prizes like an idle pocket gathered lint.

"Come back in an hour," he barked at Evans. "No, two. These must submit to magic. You know Jotautas' Deli over on Fornon Street? The Lithuanian who makes the great kielbasa?"

Evans said he did.

"Get me six of those sausages. He makes a special batch with extra garlic and spices. Tell him the order is for the Mad Dutchman and he'll know what to wrap up. And one quart sauerkraut. I'll do the blow-ups and then lunch. VanRokken wastes no moves."

Two hours later, Evans was back with the five-alarm sausages and sauerkraut. He found VanRokken standing before a big bay window that had been opened to chest-level. Evans wasn't sure whether the old Dutch photographer was taking in a little late-morning air or getting ready to jump.

"On the table. In the manila envelope. I wouldn't look at them right away, unless you're into shock therapy."

"No good?" Evans asked.

"Poor resolution," said VanRokken. "You were too far away from your subjects. You'll be able to differentiate gender, but that's about all. The one guy could be smoking a cigar or eating a raw zucchini. And the woman with her hair over her right eye could be Veronica Lake snapped in an old movie publicity still. The resolution disintegrates."

"I've got your sausages and sauerkraut," Evans said.

"I'm too professionally sick right now to eat. VanRokken has failed in his magic."

"You . . . you're not going to jump over this are you?"

The Dutchman was still at the open window, but he was laughing now. "Jump? Oh, hell no. There's a female office worker in the next building across the court. Has a penchant for sheer blouses and no bras. But the sun's got to shine down between the buildings *just so* . . ."

THE SUN WAS STREAMING THROUGH THE WINDOWS OF Hiram's On the Canal in such a way that it was making Evans' spinach salad dazzle like a bowlful of emeralds. His appetite the past few days hadn't been at its best, but he was going through the motions for the girl's sake as she was likely going through them for him.

"Those are Willapa oysters, Tommygun, the *prix fixe* dinner. And you can't send oysters back to the kitchen. Look; we're not the police and we're not private detectives. We wouldn't know where to begin. So eat, eat. I'm sure they're doing the best they can to find her."

Cassandra Deschanes had been missing three days now. The Jaguar had been found on an upper level of the parking garage at the airport sixty miles away. The time on the metered ticket on the car's dashboard read 11:52 a.m.

Computer Terminals at ten airlines all failed to identify Cassandra Deschanes as a ticket purchaser. Over fifty ticket agents failed to

connect a recent photograph of the woman with anyone they'd confronted across a ticket counter that day. For whatever reasons and by whatever means, Cassandra Deschanes had vanished quite successfully into thin air.

On the third day—the present one—a police detective arrived at the lake to interview Evans. His name was LeDuc, a short man with compact, gym-honed muscles and a tendency towards letting his investigation wander from its path. At one point of divergence, he confessed to Evans that he was thinking of changing his name. No one in his family had spoken French going back four generations, nor knew anything *about* France. He was beginning to suspect his name was a fraud and so he had hired a genealogist to climb up into his family tree, give it a good shaking and see what fell out.

He also confessed to Evans that he drank on duty. He was partial to German lagers, but all Evans had on the day they met was domestic. LeDuc told him that was fine, too. He drank a lot of beer on duty, as he said, but it never showed in him as drunkenness. His metabolism must be blessed, he said, because there was no other explanation for it.

Soon LeDuc's tangential manner brought him around to the matter of Evans' relationship to the missing woman. The detective seemed a little disappointed when Evans told him their paths had crossed on only two occasions, once at the village store and a second time at the Deschanes house after an incident involving some failed automobile brakes.

At the latter, LeDuc's interest grew keener. Evans told him what he knew of the incident, while LeDuc jotted careful notes in a small pad.

Also brought to light was the fact of Evans' wildlife photography and how he may have overstepped ethical boundaries by extending the range of his subject matter.

"No worse than photographing babies in the park," LeDuc had told him. "In fact, I'd be much interested in borrowing your negatives to make a set of contacts. Your negatives will be returned to you, of course. Thus far, we have no proof that any crime has been committed, just the fact of a missing person, so your photos can't be treated as evidence. But you might begin collecting a set of the negatives where the subject matter might seem to apply. No hurry on it. I have a feeling this case file will be active and ongoing for quite a little while."

Evans had then mentioned the two men who'd come to the Deschanes house bearing papers for him to sign.

"Anthony Deschanes' renewed union involvement, yes," LeDuc had said. "Quite a lot of people are interested in that, I've learned."

It had also developed that except for Anthony Deschanes himself,

Evans had been the only one to witness Cassandra Deschanes leaving the house on the morning of her disappearance.

"That would have been on Thursday," LeDuc had wanted verified.

"Yes, Thursday," Evans had said. "She was carrying her purse, an overnight bag and a small suitcase."

LeDuc thumbed back through his notes. "Yes, that's in complete agreement with what Mr. Deschanes told me. And she left alone?"

"Yes."

"And her husband didn't follow after her?"

"No, he remained at home the entire day. Thursdays, he tends roses. Fridays, he jogs."

LeDuc asked Evans for one more beer to sip while he finished up his notes. It was amazing to watch the way his metabolism burned up all that alcohol almost as quickly as it entered his body. Four beers and his speech wasn't slurred and his logic made perfect sense. "You see, Mr. Evans, it's been contended all along by others that Anthony Deschanes married Cassandra Bourders to prevent her from testifying against him in any trial. Remember, she'd worked in his union's office for quite a while and may have been privy to records and information that might have incriminated Deschanes.

"The newspapers were leaning pretty heavily on the love triangle aspect. The intimation was that the first Mrs. Deschanes always suspected quite a lot more was going on in that union office apart from collecting dues and painting picket signs. Her husband's lack of ethics and the hint of scandal and an impending trial were only the final straws.

"Yes, there exist in this matter several aspects of the television soap opera," LeDuc had mentioned. "But right now, my only concern is the whereabouts of Cassandra Deschanes. And the first wife. She seems to have dropped suddenly from sight as well. My gut tells me she's connected in all of this in some way, but speculation like that is still a little premature. I'm still trying to fill in my scorecard with the names and numbers of all the players."

Evans had offered LeDuc another beer, but the detective declined. There were blank spaces in his scorecard to fill in. They shook hands and Evans watched LeDuc go back down the narrow path to his city sedan parked in front of the bungalow. His step was steady and true—a perplexed, bogus Frenchman in search of two missing women. Evans didn't think he'd find either of them.

"Hey, Tommygun, they make their own desserts right here in the kitchen. So howzabouts we tackle the lemon mousse parfait?"

Beatty Cook's voice pulled Evans up into the present like Deschanes'

gunning of the speedboat had pulled his water-skiing wife to the water's surface.

"Dessert? No, I don't think so. Maybe a little more coffee, though."

"Going out to eat with you is always such a joyous treat, Tommygun. Like accompanying you to a stoning or a beheading."

A sailboat was moving down the canal beyond the window. South, out of Evans' view, it would pass through a set of locks and onto an inland lake.

Cassandra Deschanes would turn up in time. She'd gone off somewhere by her own decision and for her own good reasons and had chosen not to tell anyone or make any lengthy explanations. We lived in a mobile society and we were nearly always at liberty.

Evans continued watching the sailboat in its bulky grace and waited for his fresh coffee.

THE POLICE BOAT WAS STILL RUNNING THE QUIET waters of the lake, and the divers were still searching the volcanic ridges, those jagged sloping traps where a body might have become snagged and prevented from sinking to oblivion.

Police work was fascinating to watch even when nothing was happening. From the deck Evans picked out officers roaming back and forth over the Deschanes' property. Some wandered through shrubbery and hedges, others dug and probed in exposed soil. Still others stalked the narrow beachfront, examining random patches of sand and scrutinizing dead logs and volcanic boulders.

This was the fourth day after Lt. LeDuc's interview of Evans, and Evans already knew that most people who had been missing that long usually turned up dead.

And Cassandra Deschanes had now been missing one full week.

At one point, LeDuc re-interviewed Evans about the day he said he saw Mrs. Deschanes leaving the house with her luggage. Maybe Evans had been wrong about the day being Thursday. Could not the day have been *Wednesday*, Cassandra Deschanes' regular tennis day. And could not the luggage have been the blue, oversized athletic bag.

Evans knew his memory and his resolve were being tested, because it seemed an important matter to LeDuc. But Evans remained firm. He told LeDuc he was certain the day had been Thursday and the luggage had been an overnight bag and a small suitcase.

The incident of the BMW's failed brakes were also a thing grating on LeDuc's sensibilities, like a seed lodged between two teeth. Josh Mayerlink, the old village store clerk, had told him of the curious fact of Mrs. Deschanes' absence from the village a full week before her

disappearance. "Everything delivered," a perplexed Mayerlink had told LeDuc. "Not normal for her, not right for her not to come down to the villager."

A frequent village visitor suddenly turned recluse. LeDuc didn't judge that to be normal either. And so they would search for a body, while LeDuc held in mind a dual premise: Cassandra Deschanes absented herself of her own free will; and Anthony Deschanes, alone or in concert, murdered his wife.

THROUGHOUT THE MORNING, EVANS INTERMITTENTLY monitored the activity on the lake. But soon the monotonous back-and-forth plowing of the police boat and futile dives of the divers became boring. Evans had his own little thriller to finish and that was paycheck work, not just a fistful of photographs to fill up a new file drawer.

LeDuc still had not turned up to collect Evans' negatives. Perhaps the detective's ardor for them had cooled. Maybe reason was telling him there would be nothing to gain from a batch of pictures of people whose faces couldn't even be positively identified.

Nevertheless, Evans had developed a complete set of prints, each one dated and timed, as were his negatives, which were now in number-ten envelopes in a safe deposit box at the Teachers' Metropolitan Bank in Beatty Cook's name. Cloak and dagger stuff. Maybe union goons would come after Evans when they learned Evans had a surreptitious union meeting immortalized on film. Well, let them come. Most union goons couldn't find up if you showed them down and then pointed towards the sky.

LeDuc's copies were still in a jumbled mess and so Evans began to lay out a complete set on the big, oval oak table in his dining room. Their sheer numbers surprised him a little until he remembered he'd been at it over five weeks.

All told, there were more than two hundred different prints where there was at least a single human subject. Plus the handful featuring Anthony Deschanes and his two visitors in the dark, cardboard suits.

Evans spread and sorted, sorted and piled. And although he did not know it at that moment, he was staring down at murderers.

The observer brings with him a good portion of what he thinks he sees . . .

But it was inevitable that he would finally see them, recognize killers. And when he did, so much then depended upon the order of things, the sequence of events. He worked with the photographs carefully, placing this one here, that one there, the other in between, only to be moved again. The chronology of them was very much like the order in which

players entered and exited the stage in a play. One entrance in error and the play made no sense. And a good play was as much timing as it was content.

Slowly the order came. And when it emerged, Evans knew who had conspired to murder Cassandra Deschanes. He also knew what had become of her corpse, which was not to say where it could be found, only its disposition. They had been diabolically and painstakingly clever, the both of them.

And Evans was factored in to be their bankable eyewitness all along.

To confirm that, Evans called Beatty Cook in the city. Had she, he asked, told Cassandra Deschanes of Evans' penchant for photography? And that he had a telephoto lens to bring up close the geese and ducks of the lake?

Yes, the girl answered Evans. She'd told Cassandra Deschanes that.

And then Cassandra Deschanes had told her husband. Harmless chitchat. Like talking about the weather. Or revealing a little bit of village gossip. Only it was like affixing a signature to her death warrant, done by her own hand.

THE DESCHANES' TELEPHONE NUMBER WAS STILL ON THE topmost page of the telephone pad where Beatty Cook had jotted it down. Evans dialed it. The answering voice was a little anxious and fearful.

"Hello? Anthony Deschanes speaking."

Evans didn't identify himself. He only asked to speak with Lt. LeDuc. Deschanes was compliant and obedient. He seemed not to recognize Evans' voice, only taking him to be someone with the police.

"One moment, sir."

Evans put down the receiver and went out to the deck. Through the camera's telephoto lens he saw a man emerge from the rear of the Deschanes' house. He descended the steep flagstone walk down to the beachfront and walked to the entrance of the narrow concrete finger pier. There he spoke with a second man with a bullhorn affixed to his wrist with a strap, then turned and retraced his path back up to the house. The second man, in turn, strode to the end of the concrete pier and lifted the bullhorn to his mouth.

Out on the lake the short man standing at the stern of the police boat swung his head in the direction of the Deschanes' house. He stood stock still a minute, then gave a wave of acknowledgement towards the man on the pier. In another minute, the police boat was revving its engines. It turned in a graceful arc and headed for the concrete pier.

Evans returned to kitchen, picked up the telephone receiver and

waited.

The observer brings with him a good portion of what he thinks he sees . . .

The chronology was so vital, the dates and times crucial if Evans was to convince LeDuc of a conspiracy to murder. But for that to happen, LeDuc would have to read in the photographs what Evans himself saw, what probabilities were presented in them. Not evidence, not hard, set-in-concrete fact. But . . .

"Lt. LeDuc speaking," the voice said over the line.

"This is Thom Evans, lieutenant. From across the lake."

"Yes, I remember. We're dragging the lake. As you can probably see."

"For Mrs. Deschanes' body," Evans said.

"Yes, that's correct, Mr. Evans. We're going over the grounds as well. No stone unturned, as they say."

"I don't think you're going to find Cassandra Deschanes' body in the lake," Evans told LeDuc. "And I don't think you'll find it buried on the Deschanes' property, either."

"I won't," said the skeptical LeDuc. "And why won't I, Mr. Evans?"

"Well, it has to do with my photographs."

"Yes, I'm sorry about those. I told you I'd stop by for a set of your negatives. Unfortunately, other matters forced me to put off the trip."

"Well, lieutenant, I think you'd better come by for them now."

"Well, I can't easily do that, Mr. Evans. I've got a lot of manpower committed here. And I can't very well put a halt to the search simply upon your say-so."

"What if I were to prove to you the woman's body won't be found in the lake or buried anywhere nearby," Evans told LeDuc.

"That's a pretty tall order, Mr. Evans. But I can't just drop everything here. If you could give me some idea of what you suspect. And what proofs you have to back up your suspicions . . ."

Slowly then, going very carefully to guard that no vital link be left out, Evans explained what his photographs revealed. His notions were gruesome to say the least, a sour business; but he went on with it painstakingly, right to the bitter and tasteless end.

And when he'd finished, even LeDuc himself seemed too stunned to speak. And he'd likely confronted it all in his time, every permutation of murder, every manner of weapon and motive, every personality profile.

Finally, the detective managed to send his voice across the line.

"And you say these two union men showed up at the Deschanes'

house *before* she was murdered?"

"I think they were there to plan Anthony Deschanes' re-entry into the unions. And I think Cassandra Deschanes was fated to be eliminated all along."

"I believe I'd better come over there and look at those photographs, Mr. Evans," said LeDuc in a cold tone.

"When?"

"Only as long as it takes me to drive around the lake. Just have those pictures ready for me to look at. And in some chronology so I can be persuaded what you're telling me is true, or even possible."

IT WAS NOT POSSIBLE TO IMPANEL AN IMPARTIAL JURY in Kacheen County. Neither was it possible to do so in any adjacent county inasmuch as Anthony Deschanes was well-known throughout the state for his union activities. Finally, agreement was reached to conduct the murder-trial proceedings against the former Pamela Deschanes and her ex-husband three states distant from the one in which the alleged killing had taken place.

In the beginning it was impressed upon Evans that he might be summoned as a prosecution witness. But the distance and expense involved made that prohibitive. And there was little pertinent testimony he could give. LeDuc told him his photographs would be introduced as prosecution evidence; and those, together with the other physical evidence LeDuc and his men had gathered, these were more than enough to gain a conviction.

News of the two-week trial appeared in the local papers, but it was not detailed or specific and Evans' name was never mentioned in any context. Old Josh Mayerlink of the village had taken the witness stand briefly. Very little of his testimony was admitted, except for the fact of Cassandra Deschanes' abrupt disappearance from the village.

During the time the trial's venue question was being argued, Evans moved back to the city. He resumed his post as a general assignment reporter for his newspaper. He drew a wide variety of reportorial jobs but none related to the murder trial. Many of his coworkers commented upon how healthy he looked and how balanced and targetted were his attitude and mental outlook. Others asked about his bird photography, but none knew of his ancillary involvement with a murder case, or of his evidential photographs. He had wanted it all left out at the lake and he was being granted his wish.

When the trial's verdict came, news of it appeared on an inside page of the *Herald-Star*. Both Anthony Deschanes and Pamela Jordan, his first wife, were convicted of first-degree murder. An initial charge of

first-degree criminal assistance was held out to the former Mrs. Deschanes, a charge carrying a lesser sentence. It was hoped the bait would have her pointing the finger of guilt in the direction of her ex-husband as the sole killer. But both remained silent to the end.

While it could never be proven, there was wide-spread agreement in the suspicion that Anthony Deschanes had married his union office worker only to gain some protection against his incrimination; and that Cassandra Bourders had married him in order to move up into the corridors of union power and wealth. And that she had been programmed to die all along.

As for Deschanes and his first wife, no more news of them would surface in the public presses. They consented to no prison interviews. Housed in separate federal facilities a thousand miles apart, they kept their curious bond of love and silence.

Evans thought of Cassandra Deschanes, the woman in the middle, the woman in the way. His mind would travel back to the first day at the general store on the lake and the young woman with hair like Veronica Lake, so at ease and accustomed to her new world and so soon to die.

That hair, the way it fell across her eye like a silky, yellow curtain. Where Anthony Deschanes was concerned, that fall of hair was her symbolic blindspot.

The observer brings with him a good portion of what he thinks he sees . . .

IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN A TRICK OF DISTANCE OR ANGLE, but Evans thought he saw LeDuc. Evans was on his way to an airport concourse to begin some interviews on theft and loss in the airport's automatic baggage transport system. He was passing the open entrance to the Flight Deck Lounge and saw a squat man sitting alone at the bar drinking beer from a green long-neck bottle.

As Evans closed the distance between them, he could see that it *was* LeDuc, although LeDuc's identifying Evans wasn't coming all that easily, as the detective fought a little trying to pinpoint Evans in time and space as Evans extended his hand in greeting. After all, it had been nearly ten months since they'd last met.

"Thom Evans. From the lake. The missing woman? About a year ago."

The detective's expression softened as his memory of specific people and events returned. "Yes, of course. How are you, Mr. Evans?"

"Just fine."

"How long has it been?"

"Ten months," Evans said.

"*Tempus fugit*," said LeDuc. "It's the only Latin I know, if you don't count Cesar Romero. You forget the time in this business. So many cases, so much police work."

"I understand. Can I get you another German lager?"

"My turn this time," said the detective. He waved for the bartender, who brought a draft for Evans and another lager for LeDuc.

"So," Evans said, "are you coming or going."

"Going," answered LeDuc. "Extradition. I'm transporting a warranted murder suspect back here from Illinois. He will get a four-course meal on the plane, I'm told. Luck of stopovers and the time zones and all. If it turns out he gets the death sentence and asks for a last meal, soup to nuts, I'm thinking of intervening and telling the warden he's already had it."

LeDuc had a half-hour to spare before his flight and twenty minutes before its call, if Evans wanted to chat. Evans said he did. He exchanged his empty glass for a bottle of Red Hook Ale and they went to a table in the nearly empty lounge.

"The old man died, you know," LeDuc told Evans. "The one who ran the store in the village."

"Josh Mayerlink."

"That's the one, yes. Heart attack. But he was in a front chair in God's waiting room, anyway. He was of some value at the trial, you know. He was able to pinpoint the exact day Cassandra Deschanes stopped coming into the village to shop. That testimony together with your timed and dated pictures showing the hair gave the jury plenty to chew over."

Evans was curious to know how LeDuc was finally able to track down the first Mrs. Deschanes.

At the question, the detective's face took on a whimsical look. "Pamela Jordan. When she went into the woodwork, she kept her maiden name. I will never be able to understand why women can't be more inventive when they choose to absent themselves."

"How do you mean?" asked Evans.

"Any telephone directory will provide a fugitive with all the aliases he or she will ever need. But if the fugitive is a woman who's elected to commit social suicide, nine out of ten times she will simply revert to her maiden name. Foolproof camouflage, right? Like hiding a diamond in a jar of cold cream to make a thief's business easy."

"And the wig," Evans asked LeDuc. "Did that turn up, too?"

"Ah, yes. The blonde wig. The crux in the case, so to speak. Yes, we found that piece of evidence, too. When your photographs proved to us

the existence of a second woman with blonde hair, we began making the rounds of wig stores and costume shops and hair styling salons. We had the recent photo of Mrs. Deschanes, loaned to us by her husband on the day her disappearance was reported by him. Later, of course, we would not be looking for a missing wife at all, but her double:

"A wig like that one," LeDuc went on, "with a sweeping fall of hair on the right side . . . well, it's so distinctive, anyone would recall selling it. And recall the buyer as well."

LeDuc's lager was drained. He wagged to the bar for another and a second Red Hook for Evans. He was not enjoying the retelling of this investigation all that much. He was scowling and a bit uncomfortable in his chair.

The beer came and LeDuc took a giant gulp of his immediately.

"Where was I, Mr. Evans."

"The wig. You were tracking down its origin."

"Yes. Well, we found the place. Beth Anne's Beauty Shoppe in a little seaport town down the coast called Castle Rock. Rural country. Rolling foothills, dense pine forests. We were virtually walking in her footsteps looking for the same one-of-a-kind hairpiece.

"Castle Rock was to become their first major blunder. She took an apartment there. After buying the wig. *Trouble With Harry*. They were soon to create a corpse and they needed a place to dispose of it. They knew Deschanes property would be the first place searched by the police. And they also knew the city, where Pamela Jordan lived, was a dumping ground that was worse. So it had to be the country, which meant Pamela Jordan also had to absent herself right along with the body. A considerable risk, if we were to come calling on her in connection with the whereabouts of Cassandra Deschanes. But they knew it couldn't be done any other way."

"When did the girl die?" Evans asked then.

"We think it was that first day she failed to show up in the village to shop, the day Pamela Jordan switched places with her at the house across the lake. You see, she couldn't be seen up close by anyone at the lake now. Only at a distance. Only by you, Mr. Evans, their sole eyewitness alibi to Cassandra Deschanes' continued well-being. And to her departure for the airport with luggage—alive and well and alone."

"And there I was," Evans said, "cranking away across the lake with that camera and the telephoto lens."

"Anthony Deschanes' ex-wife now playing the role of the dead woman, who had inadvertently told her husband about your amateur photography and thereby planting the seed of their plan. Pamela Jordan assumed all the duties in her lookalike wig. The gardening, the

cleaning, the meal-making. The badminton on the lawn with her ex-husband, the water-skiing and the swimming . . .”

“Those last were the toughest for her,” Evans said. “She detested sports . . .”

“ . . . but had to go through the motions to serve the grand illusion, yes, I know, Mr. Evans. And the tennis. Well, the pretense of tennis, as your pictures revealed. Every Monday, Wednesday and Friday, bounding out of the house in the morning like Swiss clockwork, to be seen by you lugging that blue, oversized athletic bag and all those rackets. Not going off in search of a tennis court at all, but off down the coast to Castle Rock and then back again. And then, that final Wednesday, returning to the house *without* that athletic bag, the disposition completed, leaving only her trip to the airport the next morning in the Jaguar to affect the illusory disappearance of Cassandra Deschanes.”

So rapt had been Evans attention to LeDuc's summations, he was scarcely aware the lounge was filling. Some flights must have touched down. That meant LeDuc's own flight would be called soon, and there were still dangling loose ends Evans wanted tied.

“Then you must have found the wig,” he said to the detective now.

LeDuc nodded quietly. There were two more gulps of lager in his bottle, but the detective seemed to be saving them until his flight-call. “Very vital trial evidence. Without it, we had only the conjecture of your photographs. But it was there at the apartment in Castle Rock. Puzzling why it wasn't destroyed. Perhaps the mystique of it grew on her. Veronica Lake had a compelling effect upon people, one that really hasn't diminished with the passage of time. Or then again, it might have just been foolish oversight. We'll probably never know.”

LeDuc paused to stretch. He glanced around the lounge and seemed a bit startled to be in the eye of a crowd where only a few minutes before they'd had the whole place to themselves.

“Of course, none of it would have come to pass without your early suspicions, Mr. Evans. Your photographs were speaking to you and you listened. And you have your lucky stars to thank that you timed and dated those pictures.”

“And that I could get you to come across the lake to look at them,” Evans said.

“Fascinating things, human gestures. We are captives of them. We are known by them. Why, we even pass them down through our genes in a magical process of transference. Cassandra Deschanes, for example, habitually swept back that fall of blonde hair with the fingers of her right hand. Time and time again, without exception. Your

photographs showed that without refutation.

"And yet here we have an abrupt reversal of that habit, dating precisely from the day Cassandra Deschanes ceased her daily visits to the village. Now, we have her using her *left hand* in a deluge of photographs. No, not useful as evidence to be taken into a court of law to prove a crime had been committed. But very useful as a thing to give rise to our suspicions. Any why this sudden change in an ingrained habit? Because it isn't the same woman. The woman of the right-handed gesture is dead and a second woman has taken her place. A fascinating case, Mr. Evans, from start to finish. If I decide to write my memoirs on my life in police work, that one will come in for a few paragraphs."

That seemed to put a final period to the detective's thoughts about violent death at an obscure little mountain lake a summer in the past, just one case in the midst of many, now only perfectly recalled in report files. LeDuc took the last two swallows of his lager as a female voice began to announce flight departures over a public address system.

"Lieutenant," Evans spoke then, remembering a hunt of another kind, "did you ever track down the legitimacy of your French heritage?"

LeDuc seemed grateful for the change of pace in their conversation. His expression eased and he even began to smile. "Oh, yes. I remember. I told you I suspected my family name was a hoax. I was wrong. I've learned there were three families of LeDucs who all lived in the same ancestral village in France in the sixteenth century. The name of the village escapes me now and all that's left of it is a graveyard and some stones that suggest a church once stood there. Just north of a town called St. Quentin, which I found blackly amusing."

"And what did you learn of your relatives?" Evans asked.

"Innkeepers, skultery maids and tavern serving wenches. Three were unsuccessful highwaymen. Two were beheaded and the third passed away in an obscure bastille near Lyon, two thousand miles from home. My family tree is a major disappointment to me, Mr. Evans."

A Chicago flight was called. LeDuc pointed into the air and said, "Well, Mr. Evans, that's me. Chicago. And then a bus to Aurora. LeDuc Escort Service."

They walked together from the lounge. The concourse outside it was filling with foot traffic.

"It was nice running into you again, lieutenant," Evans told LeDuc. "I guess in your line of work, you don't hear too many people say that to you."

LeDuc smiled at that and the two men shook hands. Then, his

expression hardened. "Her body will turn up, Mr. Evans. Out there near Castle Rock, someday it will turn up."

"You don't think Tony Deschanes or his ex-wife will ever tell you."

"No, they seem pretty adamant about that," LeDuc said. "But we'll keep looking all the same. It's a loose end and I don't like loose ends."

Evans didn't like them either and there was one last loose one he himself wanted tied up.

"That blue, oversized athletic bag," he said to LeDuc.

"Yes, I thought you might want to know about that, inasmuch as the woman returned without it that last Tennis Wednesday. We found the bag at the apartment in Castle Rock, too."

"And did you find . . ."

". . . evidence? Yes, Mr. Evans, we did. We found traces. And in my business, traces are more than enough."

They shook hands again and then LeDuc was off down the busy concourse, dodging the traffic and finally, around a far corner and out of sight.

For the time being then, that would be Cassandra Deschanes' epitaph: traces.

But Evans would keep in touch with LeDuc; because without something more than traces, the matter still wasn't over and done. ☉

"Some touch of the artist wells up within me, and calls insistently for a well staged performance. The blunt accusation, the brutal tap upon the shoulder—what can one make of such a *denouement*? But the quick inference, the subtle trap, the clever forecast of coming events, the triumphant vindication of bold theories—are these not the pride and the justification of our life's work?"

—Sherlock Holmes
THE VALLEY OF FEAR

After almost fourteen years he wanted a career change—something that would give him pride in his work. Perhaps he could find it here!

ASPIRATIONS

by J.N. WILLIAMSON

SPRINT SAW NOTHING CLEARLY IN HIS ROOM, EVEN though his slightly puffy eyes had been open nearly an hour and he felt midday conscious. Then he saw the sparse furnishings ranged around his bed take quite sudden shape, as if materializing there from another time: the dresser with its most badly butt-scorched side shoved against the wall by the doorless closet, the Japanese-make tv with directions for getting X-rated films to flicker on its cloudy screen, half a yard from the old dresser, and the writing desk against the wall next to the twice-locked hotel room door. A placard affixed to the desk said in three popular languages that he should feel free to fetch stationery from the main desk but he doubted that most people stopping in this city, these days, bothered to do it.

Coming in last night, he'd found that they no longer left a Bible, in any language, in the desk drawer.

It hadn't surprised Sprint, the way things were abruptly distinguishable from the hot and smoky shadows. Putting his naked feet on the floor and grinding out his last American cigarette in an ashtray he'd been holding like a target in the middle of his broad chest, Sprint remembered. Twice before he'd been here, just six months ago when he'd begun setting up the meet with Mr. Somosta and ten, eleven years back, and he'd noticed at once how peculiar sunrise was here. This time, he had made himself awaken early in nervous anticipation of his luncheon appointment and partly to see, once more, the way God tried to catch the natives in the act. By bringing the sun up fast.

Five hours ago, before retiring alone, Sprint had showered. He hated showers but he'd been incapable of making himself sit in the rusted tub with cracks in the tiling large enough to accommodate all the common varieties of vermin. Now, feet slipped into hospital-style paper slippers that crackled, he checked himself to see how badly he'd perspired during the short night. Chances were, he decided, he'd be okay if he could coax some lukewarm water from the tap and then use half a can of his Right Guard. Suiting action to thought, he went into the bath, wondered if it was his imagination that he'd caught furtive motion at ground level, near the tub.

MANY THINGS ABOUT ESCAPALDO WERE DIFFERENT TO A Yankee job seeker. Mostly it was getting infected by the unhurried gait of the lawful people and slowing down, only to sense things coming out of the blue like the crazy sun itself. An ordinary guy from the American midwest mimicked sun, not people, if he wanted to go on rising. Sprint smiled. Shaving—he had to be extra careful this morning, to avoid nicks that might advertise his aspirations, hunger, need—he found that the old surprise he'd known for wanting to make this midlife career change was gone and, with it, any real hatred for starting over in a place like Escapaldo. Whatever system of government was in vogue in any country, at the time, the people shook it down and managed to squeeze into the usual groupings: winners, survivors, those on their way out, and losers. Or putting it differently Sprint mused, those who did the selling or other kinds of hitting and those who bought, and got hit upon.

Wearing fresh undergarments, the shorts picked up in Paris, Sprint unscrewed his new four-ounce bottle of the cologne Cardin made for men and paused, squinting at himself in the badly cracked mirror over the dummy medicine cabinet. Ruggedness disputed shrewdness for the initial impression anyone got, looking at his mug; later, if that same anybody wanted to recall his looks, they had an image of uninteresting

blandness and probably thought he was any age from thirty-six or -seven to the early fifties. *Unchangingness, that's one of the old Sprinter's big guns*, he ruminated, appreciative, too, of how his arms showed good muscle tone despite his loathing for exercise. It took too much time. He rubbed more Cardin into his jawline than he needed and glanced back into the mirror as he turned. *But I've changed where it counts.*

He located his recently-pressed—in New York—suit on the other bed, and sighed, wished he'd bothered to buy a new one in Manhattan before boarding his plane. Money for new threads was no problem; hell, he hadn't had trouble with cash for as long as he remembered without pain, and money certainly had nothing to do with why he'd flown to Escapaldo. True, business wasn't what it had been; he'd seen more and more of his likely prospects around the world getting cold feet because of the recession or present administration or some goddamned thing, many of them switching to what Somosta offered. New ways always had their appeal.

But the reason Sprint yearned for a career change was linked to the plain pride a man might conceivably take from his work. Once, there'd been plenty; everyone he'd wanted to know him, had. But the way life was always in flux, moving first one type of profession and then another onto the top rungs of what people noticed and respected, had made Sprint see his imminent decline before somebody else. But before it had happened, too. And caused him to start waking before dawn long before Escapaldo.

He smoothed his gray-strewn, light-brown hair down with a Fuller brush his mother had given him as half a matched set, decades ago, scarcely peering into a mirror beside the door. He buttoned his suitcoat over the bulk at his torso, scrubbed the toe of one Gucci shoe against a trouser leg and then repeated the process with economy of motion. Karl "Sprint" Silva—he had acquired the nickname in school because of quick, darting hands and feet, both on the basketball court and in too many fist fights—wasn't a guy whom nature meant to become an anachronism. He'd told himself that since well before the penultimate visit to this flaming, devious, promising city. And deep inside he'd understood that, most of all, it was a case of what Sprint Silva had left to respect about Sprint Silva. He needed to find something splendid.

FOR ALMOST AN HOUR HE TROD THE STREETS IN ALL directions from the hotel at a brisk clip, familiarizing himself the best he could with the business district. If Mr. Somosta made him an offer, please God, there'd be the grind of much travel again, sure; he could

count on it. But it also figured that his new employer would start him out in Escapaldo where they could monitor his progress, see that he took instructions efficiently. With this job or without it, he would always operate in the field, *mano a mano*, because he'd learned as a punk kid that his temper frayed and snapped more unexpectedly under close supervision.

With ten-thirty by his Benrus, a steady trickling of sweat between the shoulders began and Sprint realized he would wreck his suit ahead of lunch unless he temporarily escaped the white-hot sun. It was like people here, the sun; it slipped up on you, then bore down relentlessly. A rickety cab, a Renault that might actually have had its origins in the early sixties, took him aboard and Sprint rolled both rear windows down to allow a postage stamp inspection of Escapaldo until noon. He'd never seen so many signs posted in a town that size and none was printed in more than one language, which he read insufficiently. One of them could say, "Stop here or run over a land mine," and if the hack driver was suicidal Sprint'd never know.

He glimpsed men in military uniforms who did not seem to sweat despite tightly-knotted ties and glossy combat boots; the army of the moment, lounging against pastel-colored buildings of unguessable purpose. The men seemed preternaturally observant, like reptiles sunning themselves on high rocks; they stared at passing women whose hair was a universal gleaming patch of midnight. Either the women scurried past the soldiers, olive-skinned faces averted with ill-concealed scowls, or they dawdled, dangerously promoting their only conceivable wares. Sometimes Sprint imagined he heard thunder, but no one in Escapaldo risked raising his head or hers. Now and then merchants peeped from windows so immaculate that the glass appeared to be missing, shattered, perhaps, along with the spirit behind those cautiously-veiled, wounded eyes.

I like it here, Sprint thought, heart racing the sun. With a with-it outfit like Mr. Somosta's supporting me, I can handle assignments with half my usual preparation or pitch. He gasped sharply as several children stopped just before scuttling in front of the ancient Renault. They were like bright copper pennies thrown into the sullen avenue and they looked in at and through Sprint with eyes of obsidian which seemed plucked from the faces of corrupt and ageless priests. But the distance between him, in the costly taxi, them in the filthy street, was like sitting in a time machine staring at crucifixions. *This is a beautiful city, or it will be again; nice for a home base. I can better myself here, I can earn back my self-respect! And theirs!*

NOON CAME AND THE WHEEZING RENAULT HALTED shudderingly before La Tranquilo, the city's best-known restaurant. Outside Escapaldo, anyway. He climbed out, unable to remember when he'd felt so zestful, so ready to try the new! And this kindness of Mr. Somosta, arranging the interview away from his headquarters—what an act of consideration and courtesy! Here, it is public, anyone's meeting place with its showy, snowy columns and gracious porticos; instead of—

Leaning in to pay the cabbie, Sprint blinked, paused, was sobered by the spit-and-bark of gunfire several blocks off. He shook his head, avoided jogging to the restaurant door. Death was disgusting-sounding when it carried from a distance. Hard to believe people were dying elsewhere in town on a day of opportunity.

Just mentioning his prospective employer's name took the American on his way toward a long table to the rear, a *maitre d'* half-skipping ahead. Sprint looked around, enroute; he made no effort to hide his obvious curiosity about the others present. There were few, for such a sunny day, for such a place, and they saw Sprint all the way back.

Looking back briefly, he realized that the others were leaving or had already left except for a twirling-mustached man in a uniform that looked more than freshly cleaned and pressed. It looked new; silver gleamed at the shoulders.

"Come, *Senor Silva*, welcome!" Sun glaring on a tanned face and three-piece white linen suit of impeccable, and foreign, cut. Impossible to see the man's features. "I have taken the liberty of choosing and ordering the wine." A hand without hair gestured, to bottle and to waiter. "Will you taste it?"

"I bow to your taste, Mr. Somosta." Sprint took the right hand thrust up at him, dimly annoyed the other man did not rise. Blinking because of the flooding sun, he perceived manicured nails, got an impression of considerable strength from the other's grip. He declined the chair opposite his host, which the waiter held silently for him—the *maitre d'* had simply vanished—and moved to the end of the long table. From there, sitting, he could see a man in civilian clothes filling the entrance to the quiet kitchen. "I hear you are something of a connoisseur, Mr. Somosta."

"I was, *senor*. Alas, there's been little time lately to show suitable appreciation for such refined but minor matters."

Ah, I made a mistake. Sprint swallowed his panic. *Of course he's too busy for that kind of nonsense.* "I thank you for agreeing to have lunch with me, sir." Think, *think!* "To; well, give me the best chance."

"It is but one of my primary obligations." He shifted in his chair and

what he looked like became clear at last. Indescribably, darkly handsome and probably appealing to most women was the second thought occurring to the American. The first was that this brave man who was making headlines on both sides of the Iron Curtain could not be older than twenty-two, possibly twenty-three years of age. Somosta gave a dazzling smile, withdrew it. "And it is rare that I have the chance to evaluate someone with your credentials."

"I suppose I am pretty experienced." Sprint hoped it did not sound smug, or worse, old. "More than thirteen years now that I've—been at it."

"Fourteen years, come the autumn," Somosta amended. "Since Collins, Deplacido, Beverly Hills." This was a casual yet almost curt indication of how thorough his inquiry had been. Fingers laced, he permitted the quiet waiter to take their order before continuing, Somosta recommending and his guest politely acquiescing. Then, belatedly, he seemed astonished. "But—*fourteen years*, well, it is a considerable time, is it not?"

Sprint wagered both a smile and quip. "Time flies when you are having fun." He saw the other, younger man's face turn to stone, added, "That's a Yankee joke, Mr. Somosta."

"Are they generally marked by untimeliness and absence of taste, then?" Abruptly, Somosta laughed—a rising, high-pitched noise that trilled and brought echoing laughter from the civilian standing at the kitchen door. "And that is a sampling of our humor, Sprint."

"It gets noticed." Sprint did an impression of a chuckling man. He also suppressed the urge to tell Somosta that his nickname had an "i" sound, correctly; not a long "e."

"Forgive, *senor*, but it is hard to understand why you wish to become affiliated with my organization after such a period of time." He licked wine from his upper lip with a longer-than-regulation tongue. It looked coated. "What is it that my investigation did not disclose?"

"Nothing at all, is my guess, sir," Sprint replied. Heart beating faster, he retained his composure by mauling a red napkin in his sturdy hands beneath the table. "Mr. Somosta, please. Surely it isn't wrong for a man to improve himself. Even as you have striven to improve Escapaldo."

"Wrong? Of course, it is not wrong!" Appearing to stifle a smirk, he drew a small, round tin from his pocket, started to open it, returned it to the pocket. "Snuff," he murmured, then refilled their glasses from a carage. "But I'm obliged to wonder why you waited so long. Surely, you found other opportunities presenting themselves from time to time?"

"No. Not really." Sprint shook his head with ponderous certainty. "Not like your work, Mr. Somosta; because that kind of organization had not been in such abundance all that many years."

The youth's coal-black brows, finely drawn, raised. He looked even younger until he laughed briefly. "Another example of the Yankee humor, eh?" Again there was the swift smirk, like a flashbulb going off. "Let me confess, sir, that what my people and I are trying to do in our work is revolutionary. We require the utmost of discretion, dedication, a knack for following orders." He was no longer smiling in the slightest. "Although hired by others, you have nonetheless been, as they say, your own man. It's true?"

The red napkin twisted between Sprint's knees was starting to rip. "As far as it goes, sir. But with each assignment, without exception, I've been given orders different from all the others." He forced himself to tuck the napkin behind a condiment rack, and sipped his wine unhurriedly. "People have . . . quirks, Mr. Somostas; idiosyncrasies, personal trademarks. They like things done their way and, since I've always earned better money than my competitors, I've striven to oblige them. To get good referrals."

BECAUSE THE SERVICE WAS EXCELLENT AT LA TRANQUILLO, there could be no immediate answer. The deferential waiter had come with their food and Sprint had to wait until enough food was spread upon the table to solve twenty percent of Escapaldo's well-publicized problems with malnutrition and starvation. Sprint dug in the best he could, emulating the actions and condiment selections of Mr. Somosta.

Then the boy, mouth filled, put down his silverware and stared at the American. "I fear, *Senor Silva*, we have reached an area of major concern. Obeying orders is crucial, of course. Being able to, *ah*, extemporize, adjust yourself to unforeseen complexities, that also is vital. But, Spreent, it is the *narrower* aspects of devotion which concern my associates and, alas, me." Somosota swallowed; tears came to his beautiful eyes. "It is, at root, a matter of heart."

Sprint was startled by the word in a business context, certainly in Escapaldo. "Heart? How d'you mean it?"

"Where is your heart? That, Spreent, is what I mean." Fisting the knife and fork, Somosta trimmed fat off his meat without glancing up. He reminded Sprint of someone then. But there was a distracting siren somewhere in the neighborhood. Soldiers of the military to shoot them down, civilian doctors to sweep them up and mend them. "Allow me to put it this way: To what, and to whom, have you *given* your heart, eh?

If, indeed, you have."

Burning bubbles boiled inside Sprint Silva, more painfully now—unless he merely had less tolerance for them, with age—than they'd been when he won his nickname, and the many times afterward. He tightened muscles in his calves, formed fists under the table, to keep from blurting out his old, unspent fury or his craving to find a road to self-redemption. *I don't think it's working out*, he thought. *I don't know if it's something I said, or didn't say. Maybe this highhanded brat asked me here simply to tell an American to go to hell.*

"I've never been free—because of what I do—to give my h-heart to anybody, anything," Sprint began. He found his voice raspy but kept it down. "This is why I spoke to your people about getting an interview." His voice was breaking but he was helpless to prevent it. "Being my own man has meant a solitary existence, Mr. Somosta."

"So? We are born alone, die alone. Why do we think it may be better in between, eh?"

"We *try*; or we'd like to." He looked at his hand, couldn't imagine what to do with it. He'd wanted this so much. "But being on the go, the run, with no roots—"

"Precisely," Somosta said, and looked back at his half-cleaned plate. "Your loyalties—"

"Sir." Sprint reached out on impulse, touched the top of the youngster's hand. It was dry, it was cool; the hand was whipped away. "I need a chance to do something that isn't intended for mere financial gain—or for one man alone. Especially when I'm always that one man." He saw Somosta's knife and fork stop moving, his lips twitch. "I'd like to help you make this a better country, a better *world*."

"Better?" Somosta looked up and he was smiling. This time the flash kept burning, like one among many in a village square, perhaps, the flame spreading. "*You want to help me . . . ?*"

Sprint saw the red napkin go to the younger man's lips and the way his deep, smoldering, pretty eyes glittered with merriment. "Please," Sprint said. "Don't laugh out loud."

The dark eyes went flat, like chocolate left in a freezer compartment for weeks. Then they glazed; bored, he looked away. "You have not eaten. Do you know how many peasants would surrender their toes, their *teeth*, to eat what I placed before you—or to sit where you sit?"

THAT WAS IT. HE NEEDED NO ONE TO DRAW PICTURES for him. He sensed tears welling into his puffy eyes because it had happened often enough. He knew only one way to stop them before he could see nothing, maybe not even the sudden sunrise of a spying God.

"Don't talk to me about your hungry peasants." Sprint put his spatulate fingertips on the edge of the food-laden table, the half-moons of his nails rising cautiously above the table cloth. "I'd have killed some of them, but I won't have it said that anybody from my country is guilty of starving them."

"*Ideals!* You speak to *me* of ideals, responsibilities, guilt—you?" Somosta crammed more food into his mouth, nervously; it was a magic trick the way he could speak clearly through it. Sprint remembered a freshman he'd known on the basketball team in Muncie, Indiana, a thousand years back; a boy who had eaten his way off the team. The boy was a congressman now with a book out. "You, *senor*, a hitman—a *professional killer*—who had the gall to seek to join our splendid *revolucion*?"

"I hoped it would be splendid." He wasn't looking at Somosta but toward the civilian in the kitchen doorway, then at the new-uniformed soldier halfway toward the front door, and the street. He knew they were looking back at him but he hadn't spoken loudly and Somosta was laughing so he smiled back. "I thought we had things in common, kid. Terror, but aspiration. Courage, maybe. Death. But you just play sneaky little power games for spite, right, to be king of the hill for a few pathetic weeks? The one real difference is, I wouldn't be killing for my big bucks alone. I'd be killing for your two-bit power—and whatever you'd share until the next snotnosed brat told the people better lies."

"Get out of my place," Somosta said, livid, a fat kid who knew the team didn't really want him. "Get out of my *country*—before the nightfall! Such scum as you can halt progress in its tracks!"

"You got that right," Sprint said.

He didn't stand, he didn't lean forward, he didn't lean discernibly to one side or the other. But he had the automatic out of the holster in his armpit and was firing it before Colonel Somosta or his two lieutenants so much as budged.

Shot one, meant to send the uniformed man farthest away scrambling under the table, passed through the officer's head instead. It had been a hard target for a hand piece and Sprint had meant to return his attention to the soldier.

The civilian, exactly as Sprint had calculated, was both too inexperienced and slow and too much disposed to wait for his commanding officer's command. Shot two found its way into a region of the man's torso close enough to the heart that complaining about a miss amounted to quibbling.

The third shot came a fraction of a second later, because Sprint wanted the boy to understand with all his heart and soul that it was

coming. "The revolution's over," he said, and fired. A geyser of good food rose from Somosta's gaping mouth like a miniature mushroom cloud and it was finely flecked with a color of red that nicely matched La Tranquilo's napkins.

There'd been very little noise.

They may be right about old dogs, Sprint reflected, not without final regret. He holstered the automatic, then accepted the waiter's handshake and voluble, untranslated verbal praise with a sense of pleasure that he knew he would think about in hotel rooms with slower sunrises, and longer shadows.

He patted the waiter on the arm, awkwardly, moved toward the door, and paused to glance back at the bleeding, dead boy sprawled across the table. "I hoped there'd be splendor somewhere," he said. ●

MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAKERS

J.N. Williamson (*Aspirations*) tells us:

"Aspirations" marks a return to the ever-intriguing world of mystery and crime on which I cut my wordworker's eyeteeth. Along with another new non-horrific yarn—"Risk Taking" in *Espionage* magazine—I seem to be branching out. A new small-press publisher named Bill Munster, editor of *Footsteps*, is working with me on a collection of my Sherlock Holmes stories and essays. This harks back to my boyhood publication of three now-rare Holmes anthologies, which, by the way, are being reprinted by Magico, Inc., and Sam Gringras. At one point I was the youngest Baker Street Irregular of them all. The other special pub is called CREEPY CLICHES & SINISTER SYNONYMS, for which the nonpareil Ray Russell has done a witty introduction. A fictionary of horrific cliches and euphemisms, Paul Ganley of Weirdbook Press is also bringing it out during 1985.

But I'll never leave readers of my horror fiction in the lurch. Now that the anthology MASQUES is a success, I'm publishing a new novel, LADIES OF THE LONGEST NIGHT (Leisure; September 1985), which I think is my best.

Caine smiled. It was going to be a good evening. To make her suffer, then to reward her gave him a dizzying sense of power!

Show Up

by DEBORAH RUSSO

THE GIRL WALKED ON THE CONCRETE IN FRONT OF THE department store. It wasn't that cold yet, but the dampness made her legs numb. Caine always instructed her to wear dresses and not to wear any hose. She reached the end of the building, paused and turned around. Then she began the walk back to the opposite end, never glancing at the pavement, never taking her desperate, eager eyes from the parking lot. There were many green station wagons out there today. None held the right driver. Walking. Pacing from one end of the store to the other. And back. The raw leather of her new shoes dug into her bare heels until they bled. She shivered. She had always been acutely sensitive to cold.

"Don't wait inside the store," Caine had instructed, "for I might not see you."

They had missed each other before.

Where was he? His wife was going to be out of town for the whole day and Caine had been sure he could make it this time. So she had called in sick at work. She needed the money that would be docked

against her check next week. Caine knew she was trying to save enough to go back to school and get her diploma.

Shoppers, coming and going, passed her, ran into her, for she could not take her eyes off the lot long enough to look where she was going. Her heart leaped—there he is! No, no it's not him. She blinked her eyes rapidly. He was thirty minutes late. She would wait another half hour, then if he didn't—no, he had to show up today. He just had to.

THE MEN'S CLOTHING SECTION WAS AT THE FRONT OF the department store, just inside the gigantic plate glass windows that mirrored the parking lot outside. Caine was totally at ease standing behind a clothing rack, watching her. He smiled. She had no idea why this unromantic department store was one of his favorite rendezvous points. But he could get such a good view of her from here. She couldn't see him, not even if she shifted her gaze from the mass of cars to the building behind her. And if she disobeyed his instructions and came in—well it was a large and crowded place.

Besides, being a store manager himself at a supermarket not far from here, he could always take refuge in the store room. He could use a professional pretext if an employee became suspicious. There had been a rash of burglaries lately where the thieves would often try to hide in the store room until stores were locked up for the night. By remaining undetected the thieves skipped the inconvenience of breaking in, having only to break out, getting a big head start on any alarm system. Store personnel had to be especially careful of strangers in storage areas. He would use the store room only as last resort to keep her from discovering that he was watching her.

And Caine loved nothing better than the sight of her. The sight of her watching and waiting for him. He was always astonished at how long she could hold out, hoping he would make it at the last minute. Of course, he had to show up some times to keep up the affair. He tried to space his appearances to once every two or three weeks but he had cleverly concluded that he must be careful not to be too methodical. She might become suspicious. So he worked out a plan to give her a lot all at once, then nothing for a good long while. Today was the fourth time in a row that he hadn't shown up. Next time he'd have to show up. Well, next month was his birthday. She always gave him a nice present.

Caine clicked his tongue. His hand gripped a blue leather jacket and his palm began to sweat. Today his absence was hitting her hard. She appeared close to tears. He'd never seen her cry before. In the past she had taken every disappointment with a stern disciplined expression and soft reassurances to him that she still loved him, that she understood.

He was married.

Caine laughed out loud. What a fool she was. His hand clenched the leather jacket tighter. All his senses were alert. She was preparing to leave, searching her purse for car keys. She was the picture of self-control. But her shoulders slumped, as she trudged to her car. Her blonde stringy hair shifted on the collar of her coat. All the while her head slowly revolved, searching in the vain hope that he might suddenly appear at the last minute and save her day. He did that sometimes. Rarely. He knew if he burst from the store, calling her name she would greet him joyously, then lovingly chide him for being so late.

Before she slipped behind the wheel she glanced in Caine's direction and caught his eye so that he jumped back pulling the leather jacket off its hanger. But no, no she hadn't seen him. It was just his imagination. Her car was too far out. She could not possibly see inside the store in any detail, for the sun had appeared and was now shining directly on the huge plate glass windows.

He could no longer watch her. She was down inside her car, the little yellow Honda that circled the lot anxiously. It passed in front of the store and he stepped back. But she was looking towards the street. She hit her brake, believing his wagon had turned in. Of course, she was mistaken. He was driving his wife's car today. Now he could see her face. She bit her lip but this time to his chagrin her shoulders didn't sink. Instead she tossed her head and drove on. Displays of emotional strength always annoyed him. Some day he would crush that stubborn willpower she had. He relaxed as the Honda vanished taking in comfort in the thought she would cry when she got home. He was sure of it.

"May I help you, sir?" A department store saleswoman was giving him a strange look.

He turned his most charming smile on her. "Now about this leather jacket . . ."

A SATURDAY, IN EARLY DECEMBER, A WEEK SINCE THE department store set-up, after watching her wait for half an hour, Caine showed up.

They left their usual cheap motel after an hour. He took her to a shopping mall in the elegant part of the city where no one knew them. She floated from shop to shop with him and almost died with joy when he spontaneously purchased a small beaded evening bag for her. Then it was time to go.

She had thought her parting words out carefully, for the day was almost over for them, and she didn't want to spoil it by arousing his temper.

"Caine?"

"Yes, Jen?"

"I wanted to talk to you. I mean—" She fumbled with her hair to hide the dismay she always felt when he called her by the nickname he'd bestowed on her. It sounded ugly, like an insult.

"Well, Jen, what is it?"

"I don't seem to see you very often any more. And I just hoped—I mean I know you try to come but if you could just show up more often—"

She stopped speaking when she saw him lick his lips.

"Go on, sweetie, finish what you want to say."

"Well, please won't you try to see me just a little more often." She stared at him. She wanted a certain response.

Caine drew her close to him. "I do try. If only things were different. If I weren't married, you know. I'll try, Jen."

Why couldn't he use her right name? She was silent. Her eyes dropped.

He put his index finger under her chin and raised her face to his. "We'll see each other before spring," he said, smiling at her.

IN LESS THAN A MONTH THE PLACID WINTER HAD BECOME a killer. Tonight the temperature was in the teens and the wind chill factor made it something below zero. The populace shuddered and plugged in its electric blankets.

Would the little blonde brave the cold, as much as she hated cold, for his affections? The cold front had been expected. He could have seen her while temperatures were still civilized. But he wanted to see her wait in the cold. He needed to see her shivering in the cold for him. It gave him a safe and secure feeling in the pit of his stomach.

PARKING IN FRONT OF THE GROCERY STORE WHERE CAINE worked as manager brought back many memories for her. It had been a year since her brief job there. A year since the dizzying moment Caine had professed his love. Love at first sight with an older, handsome man. Every young girl's dream. Especially if she were plain and awkward and heretofore ignored by the opposite sex. Never mind that he was married. That did not matter. At last she had someone to love.

With the motor killed it took only seconds for the car to become chilled. Damn! Why wouldn't he let her inside? The place was closed and no one except Caine was working late. She could not see him. But she knew he was in there, working late. She phoned him at the store before she left home. He had definitely shown up this time.

INSIDE THE STORE CAINE STOOD BEHIND A COUNTER hiding from her view. But he could see her. He glanced at his watch. He had carefully timed the evening. At 9:00 the store closed. He had told her that he had to work a little later. She should get there by 9:30. He would keep her waiting until 10:30. Then he would come to the door and wave "just a few more minutes" to her and disappear again. Around 11:00 he would finally go to her. He had not realized the work would take so long. How stupid of him. He should have told her to come later.

Hearing her start her engine to heat the car, Caine felt the warm glow of satisfaction. It was going to be a good evening. To make her suffer, then to reward her in the same time period, gave him such a dizzying sense of power that he dared not make the practice a habit. He saw the worried anxious look come over her face. He knew how she felt, her stomach all knotted, her heart beating rapidly beneath her small breasts

His face muscles tightened. He could slash her but she would never cry out, he could crush her but she would never complain.

But not yet. Someday. But-not yet. He would not let himself lose control tonight.

A jar of fruit, on the verge who knows how long, fell from a shelf and shattered into a million pieces . . .

TEARS CAME TO THE GIRL'S EYES. IT WAS ALMOST 11:00. For a year she had waited for Caine in all kinds of weather, in all kinds of places. Who was he, anyway, that she should give so much to receive so little? Just a man. Look around. There are millions of men.

Cold. Awful, awful cold. Start engine. Stop engine. She couldn't afford to burn all her gasoline to keep warm while she waited for Caine to show up.

She held her head back to address the heavens.

Why is he doing this to me?

Why is he doing this . . .

Why . . .

A door slammed shut in her mind. She leveled her head and her lips froze in a grimace.

INSIDE THE STORE CAINE PICKED UP A HALF-EATEN APPLE off the floor. Damn customers, thieves, Caine thought as he threw it at the garbage can. He missed.

Thieves . . . customers . . . thieves . . . As Caine felt cold steel pressed against his neck his thoughts would not stop but flickered in his

mind like an endangered flame.

"Just do as we say and you won't get hurt. Is that your pretty little blonde sweetie waiting out there?" The voice behind the gun was richly intoxicated.

"Uh—yeah." Caine's mind whirled. Before locking the doors to keep her out he had forgotten to check the store. He was in the hands of thieves. Two dirty desperate criminals. He shut his eyes tightly. They would want the money in the courtesy booth but he determined to talk them out of it.

"Don't worry, we won't disturb that pretty little thing," said the gunman, showing huge rabbit-like teeth. "We don't need any more witnesses. We was real patient expecting you two to leave but it got to where it looked like you were going to stay in here all night."

"Yeah. She can just sit out there," said the other, a little more sober than his partner. "If she's lucky she won't try to come in to be with her sweetie. If she's lucky she'll just be patient and wait. In the meantime we'll have the money in the safe."

The robbers led Caine through the back of the store where she could not see them through the front windows.

He would be a hero. He could see his picture in the paper already. He would talk them out of it. Talk, no force, no one hurt. Just plain charm and common sense talk. Wasn't that what he did best? There was close to fifteen thousand in the safe. The company would reward him greatly for saving it. A promotion, new prestige . . .

"Now, look," Caine said. "You're locked in. You can't escape without setting off the silent alarm at the police station."

They both laughed so loudly that he flushed.

The small courtesy booth was stuffy but they listened patiently as Caine explained that what they were doing was foolish and they were bound to get caught and how the consequences would be very bad for them if they carried out their plan. They nodded to each other with dopy exaggeration, muttering "that makes sense" and "we sure understand" until Caine ran out of words and stopped. Then the one with the rabbit teeth put the gun to Caine's head and said, "Open it or we'll blow your brains out," in the friendliest, deadliest tone of voice.

OUTSIDE SHE BEGAN TO CRY.

"I loved a dream," she said out loud, "Oh, God, I have loved a dream."

Did Caine think she was a fool? Didn't he realize she could see what he was doing to her, could see through his perverse game. He refused her calls, made dates that he deliberately broke. And last time he had

showed up she had even seen him watching her before he came to her, pretending to have just arrived. Watching her with that strange cruel gleam in his eyes while she loved him so much that it hurt her heart to beat.

"Oh, I would have been so good to you!" she screamed, beating the steering wheel with both fists. "If you had only let me. Just let me."

"I love you," he had said a thousand times.

But only once had she replied, "I know."

Laughter. "How do you know?"

"I can see it in your eyes," she had bluffed.

He had fallen back. The gleam broken, the facade lost. Her lie had frightened him and for an instant the barrier had been crossed. But only for an instant.

She started the car again. It was so cold.

WITH A GUN AT HIS TEMPLE CAINE LOST HIS BRAVADO and opened the safe for them. He had failed, he reflected sadly. How humiliating.

Suddenly as the robbers emptied the safe Caine felt nauseated. Fear ran out of his brain into every vein in his body. He almost lost his balance.

"Can I kill him?" asked the gunman.

"Well—" his partner shook his head, uncertain.

"Aw—why not?" White rabbit teeth glared. "No, hey man, wait."

"What?"

"I've got a great idea! Hey, how cold did the weatherman say it was gonna get tonight?"

"I don't know. Mighty cold, though, mighty cold."

"Please don't kill me," said Caine.

They laughed as they led him out of the booth.

The grocery aisles spun by and before Caine knew it they had him in the meat freezer. Meat, red meat, hanging all around him.

"Hey, we can fix this thing where he can't get out or turn off the refrigeration, ha, ha."

Cold, dead, red, meat.

"Take it all off, man," the rabbit teeth ordered, almost singing the words. "You'll chill faster."

"Say, ain't he pretty," the other one sneered.

"I'll freeze to DEATH," Caine cried. "I'll DIE before morning. Don't you understand you're murdering me?"

The thieves laughed louder and kicked his clothes down an aisle. Then they left him naked, having destroyed the thermostat and having

bolted the door so he could not escape.

Amid the meat Caine rubbed himself to keep warm. The idea flitted across his mind that the criminals would trigger the alarm when they left and the police would arrive in twenty minutes. That's it! That's right! The police would save him. Ah! Ah! The cold was a thousand hammers pounding on his body. His breath could only come from deep in his stomach up through his mouth bypassing his freezing lungs.

Caine listened for the sirens. Police would come and free him. Oh, how the cold stung. A hundred wasps. And he couldn't fight them off. His arms would not propel his hands across his body fast enough.

Time was passing. Where were the police? Somebody had to help him. He could not be left to die.

Oh, God his body hurt.

He couldn't die. He had a great future, a wife and children. People like that didn't die. Old people died. He must stay on his feet. He tried so hard to stand. He must not let himself sit down.

He could hardly force himself to move now. It was so cold. It was long past twenty minutes, his numbed mind realized. The robbers must have known how to get out without triggering the alarm.

"Somebody help me," Caine whispered. He sat huddled in the corner trying hard to keep rocking his legs back and forth.

SUDDENLY CAINE REMEMBERED HER. NEW STRENGTH shot through him. She would still be out there. He knew she would wait until he came out of the store. She loved him so much! The unquestioning adoration of first love. She had proved it, without hesitation, a million times. She wouldn't desert him now. He just had to let her know something was wrong so she would figure out he was in danger when he didn't show up. She knew he was in the store. Oh, there was hope! She knew he was there. She had called to make sure. If she understood that he was dying she would know how to help him. Because she loved him so much. She had told him so. She loved him.

And with the insane conviction that her great love for him could penetrate the walls of the meat freezer, the walls of the store and the walls of her car and carry his words through to her, Caine ran to the bolted door and beat it, screaming with all his breath and strength: "GENEVIEVE, help me! Help me! Help me, GENEVIEVE! GENEVIEVE!"

But outside, where a few dim stars fought their way through the cold night clouds, the little yellow Honda had long since vanished. ●

He was cruel and sadistic, and he loved to kill. He was a perfect candidate for a very exclusive club!

Live Target

by FRED EBEL

BRYAN WINCED WHEN THE BIG MAN SHOT THE MEADOW lark that strayed over station number 4 on the skeet field. He was a mild-mannered man, but cruelty gave him strength. "Did you have to do that?"

The man grinned. "I like live targets. These clay birds aren't much fun."

He was the direct opposite of Bryan—bull-necked, thick-set, muscular and a face spider webbed with blue veins. Bryan noted on the score sheet that his name was S. Burlew.

Two of the shooters smiled mechanically. They want to show the stranger that they're not soft hearted, thought Bryan. The fifth man on the team muttered, "Why'd he have to do that?"

Burlew heard. "Why? Because it's more fun when the target's alive."

Bryan smiled. He'd found the perfect candidate.

THE MEMBERS OF THE SECRET CLUB WOULD BE PROUD OF him. He was certain that Burlew would find the proposition he was about to offer very interesting. But first he'd have to soften him up. "That was some great shooting," he said later. "You powdered twenty-five clay birds out of twenty-five."

Burlew shrugged massive shoulders. "Not bad. I like to keep in shape for the real fun."

"You mean hunting?"

"Yeah. I'd rather hunt than you know what."

"I know what you mean. There's nothing more challenging than a live target. I was a bit hasty before when I mentioned the meadow lark."

"No sweat." He smiled suddenly as though recalling a pleasant event. "Ever shoot mourning doves?"

"Never had the opportunity."

"Man, that's real sport! Shot a hundred of them one morning."

"They had something to mourn about." Bryan could not recall a man he'd hated more.

Burlew laughed explosively, started toward his car. "Nice talking to you, fella."

I can't lose him, thought Bryan. Such a prize. He followed Burlew to the fire-engine red Cadillac. "Leaving already? I don't often get a chance to talk to a real hunter. Bet you got a swell trophy room."

Burlew beamed. "Have I got a trophy room. Bet there's not another one like it in the country!" He slid onto the driver's seat, gunned the motor and dug out. He came to a squealing stop. "Hey! Want to see it? Follow me."

AS BRYAN SURMISED, BURLEW DROVE LIKE HE SHOT—fast. Illegally too, making one rolling stop after another on red lights. But Bryan couldn't lose his quarry; not such a prize. He'd have to break his habit of careful driving. It'd be just his luck to be stopped by the police!

They were in the country now and though it was late afternoon and cloudy, the forests were on fire with autumn leaves. But Bryan had little time to admire the scenery of Wisconsin's Kettle Moraine. The winding roads took every ounce of driving skill. At the top of the hill that overlooked the countryside. Burlew's car disappeared into an access road. Just like him, through Bryan, to have the best location in the area. Must be loaded.

When he saw the tri-level home, he appraised it at three hundred thousand. Burlew was already out of the car, waiting. Three hound dogs in a nearby enclosure barked incessantly. Bryan was not surprised when with one command from their master, the dogs stopped barking.

Bryan's admiration pleased the big man. He swept an arm toward the horizon. "Well, what do you think of it?"

"Fabulous! Absolutely fabulous. I never saw anything like it. You must feel like a king."

"I do. Come in. We'll have a drink."

Once inside, Burlew yelled, "Hey Junie, we got company."

A blonde appeared, drink in hand. Bryan judged her to be about half Burlew's age, with a figure that could have started the heart of Dr. Frankenstein's monster.

Burlew dispensed with introductions. "Make my friend and me a drink. What's your pleasure?"

"A dry martini, please."

"You heard the man, Junie. Make mine the usual."

"Sure, sure, Sam. Right away."

WHEN BRYAN SAW THE TROPHY ROOM, HIS MOUTH FELL open. Never before had he seen such wholesale carnage. A harvest of decapitations—lions, tigers, elephants, polar bears, moose. One jumbo-size elephant stood in the center of the room, attesting to the skill of the taxidermist. Trunk upraised, ears flared, the life-like animal gave Bryan a start.

Burlew laughed. "Scares you, doesn't it? I brought him down with one shot."

Yes, thought Bryan, *with a white hunter backing you up and ten natives between you and the poor beast.*

It was time to talk about the proposition. Before Bryan could speak, the blonde rolled in a service cart. Even though she had a tight grip on the cart, her hands trembled.

"Good girl, Junie. You remembered to use the cart. Last time she spilled half the drinks on the carpet. Take my advice, friend. Never marry a drunken broad."

Bryan sipped the martini. He smacked his lips. "Good!" Then leaning forward, he said, "I've got a proposition for you that I'm sure will please you."

"If it's got anything to do about hunting or making money, I'm interested."

"It's about skeet shooting."

Burlew frowned, motioned toward the mantle of the fireplace. "See all those trophies? They're all for skeet. I need another one like a hole in the head."

"But this is skeet shooting that even your wildest imagination couldn't dream up."

"Tell me about it, but don't waste my time."

Bryan looked behind as though making sure he wasn't overhead. "I belong to a private skeet club. We meet at a secret hideaway once a month. Our next meeting is this Sunday. I'd like you as a guest."

"What's so extra about your club."

"Remember when you said it was more fun shooting at live targets instead of clay birds?"

Burlew nodded.

"Well, these targets are live."

Burlew stroked his chin. "You mean like a turkey shoot?"

"No, no, nothing so ordinary. These are targets you've never seen before. And they're very much alive."

"What are the targets?"

"Sorry, I can't tell you. A strict rule of the club. But I can tell you that if you're not satisfied, your money will be refunded."

"Money? What's this about money?"

"The target fee is one hundred dollars. When you see the targets you'll say the fee would be cheap at half the price."

Burlew did some more chin stroking. "All this secrecy. I presume the operation is illegal."

"Very illegal. In fact, all our club members would be put into jail if the secret were to leak out."

Burlew jumped up, paced the floor, slapped a hand on the elephant's rump. "It doesn't make sense. Why tell me—a stranger? I wouldn't have to keep the secret."

Bryan was politely firm. "Oh, yes you would. Rule number one takes care of them. I quote, 'Any member or guest who shall reveal the nature of the club's operation to outsiders shall be put to death'."

"You enforce it?"

"Last year we had to put away two people who were about to inform. We got to them before they got to the authorities. You have no idea how efficient and fast our security system is."

Burlew's forehead creased. "You know, I believe you people would really do it."

"Don't ever test us."

Burlew slapped a knee. "I'm curious and I like to gamble. Count me in. Hey, Junie, make us another drink."

OVER THE SECOND DRINK, BRYAN PROVIDED THE DETAILS. Burlew was to memorize the directions to a remote area where he would be picked up, blindfolded and driven to the hideout. He was to leave his shotguns at home. High quality guns were available at the club, as were shells.

He was to pay one hundred dollars now as evidence of good faith.

Bryan left in good spirits; he could hardly wait for Sunday. Nor could Burlew. Both were at the rendezvous an hour before the designated time. When Bryan started to apply the blindfold, Burlew

protested. "Isn't this a little childish?"

"Sorry, the club can't take a chance. But once you're inducted, you'll understand."

"How long will it take?"

"Only fifteen minutes. We'll be going through a thick forest owned by one of our wealthy members. The vegetation is so dense you can't hear a gun two hundred yards away."

"All I've got to say is it better be good."

"You have no idea how good it will be. You're going to get the surprise of your life. Remember, you get your hundred dollars back if you're not satisfied. So far not one guest has asked for his money back. What you're about to experience will make a charging elephant seem like child's play."

"I still think the blindfold is kinda dumb."

Bryan chuckled. "Oh, come now, it isn't that bad. Besides, we're almost there. By the way, you'll be pleased to hear that the club thought your qualifications were excellent. We definitely want you."

Burlew grunted. "I don't know whether I should have gone this far. I'm beginning to get tired of all this hush-hush business."

THE BIG MAN WAS SILENT FOR THE REMAINDER OF THE trip, actually falling asleep for the last five minutes. Bryan removed the blindfold, shook his passenger.

Burlew squinted in the bright sunlight. He was pleased at what he saw. On his right was a large pretentious ranch-type building. Next to it the biggest pool he had ever seen. Behind the building was the skeet field. Burlew's brow furrowed. "I never saw one like that."

"No, and you'll soon see why."

"Those openings for the targets on the left and the right house look strange."

Before Bryan could answer they were surrounded by club members. Bryan made introductions. Burlew recognized several from accounts of philanthropy in the newspapers. They were all wealthy people. Always an opportunist, he wondered if he could sell them some insurance.

Burlew was brought into the clubhouse, where he selected a top brand 12-gauge over-and-under shotgun. "I'm ready when you are," he said, sighting down the barrel.

As they walked to the skeet field, Bryan said, "You were right when you said you never saw a skeet field like this. Notice the target openings on both houses."

"They look like doors."

"They are doors."

"So what comes out?"

"Ah," said Bryan, "that's the beauty of it. You're in for a great surprise!"

"From the size of the doors you must be using lions."

"More interesting than that, my friend. Much more interesting."

The men left for the first station. Burlew looked behind. "Only three of us? Where's the other two guys?"

"No full team because we're presently short of target material. You're lucky to be a shooter. So it'll be just you, me and the president of the club."

The president, who had been introduced as Lenny, slapped Burlew on the back. "You're in for quite a surprise, old man. So use those fine reflexes Bryan tells me you have."

"Okay? Squad ready?" called the president.

Burlew raised a hand. "Wait! What's that big hole doing out there?"

"Another one of our surprises," said the president. "Be patient."

"Okay, let's go," said Berlew.

The president closed the action on his gun and called, "Pull!" A target came out of the house. It was a poor shot, just a chip coming off the target. He called "Mark!" and a clay bird came out of the other house.

Berlew was beside himself. "Is this what I came here for? To shoot lousy clay targets."

"That was only a warmup shot," the president said. "Now comes the surprise. Watch! Bryan, you take the first one."

Bryan turned to Burlew. "I hope you're not fainthearted."

Burlew snorted. "Nothing scares me."

BURLEW WAS UNPREPARED FOR WHAT HE SAW WHEN Bryan called "pull." For a moment he did feel as though he were about to faint. He expected a wild animal. Not a man.

Coming out of the house, making a mad dash for the hole, was a man dressed only in shorts. "Don't shoot! Don't shoot!" he yelled.

The blast of Bryan's gun stilled the scream. The man lay three feet from the hole. Two club members ran out, pulled the body into the hole, ran back.

Bryan faced Burlew. "Want to back out?"

Burlew's mouth worked like a gold fish's. Finally: "*That was a real man!*"

"Biologically, yes," said Bryan. "But a human being—no. That was a rapist who had assaulted a ten-year-old girl, then knifed her twenty times before she died. A permissive court freed him on a technicality."

"All of our live targets are individuals who do not deserve to live,"

added the president.

Burlew ran a hand through course hair. "I expected live targets, but this—this is—"

"Exciting, isn't it?" said Bryan. "The ultimate, a live target with a human brain. Come now, admit it, haven't you at one time or another entertained the thought of killing a man?"

Burlew wet his lips. "Sure, often. But I never did."

"Afraid of the law, weren't you? Well, you needn't worry here. Besides, you're doing society a favor."

"You say these are bad people?"

"Sure are. The next one enjoyed torturing. Liked to see people burn. He'd pour gasoline on them and then throw a lighted match." Bryan paused for effect, then, "Want a crack at him?"

"I won't get into trouble?"

"Absolutely not! All those animals you shot were innocent victims. Now you've got your chance to rid the world of some scum. Go ahead."

Burlew could not recall a time he'd been more excited. And elated. The opportunity to kill a man and not be held responsible.

He took a deep breath, brought the gun to his shoulder and called "Pull!"

The man who emerged from the door zigzagged. What a challenge! A target with a brain for evasion. Burlew allowed the man to reach a few feet from the hole, then shot. The screaming figure dropped into the hole, relieving the cleanup crew of its chore.

"Well, how does it feel?" Bryan asked.

Burlew laughed delightedly. "Great! Just great! Well, I mean—"

"No need to apologize. You performed a useful service to society," then turning to the president: "Len, I'd say we've got ourselves an excellent candidate for the club. You agree?"

"Absolutely! Why don't you show him around."

As the president left, he said, "Now you take good care of our guest."

Bryan chuckled. "That I will. That I will."

HE LED BURLEW THROUGH A DOOR THAT OPENED INTO A tunnel. "We've got two tunnels," Bryan said. "One for the left house, the other for the right house. We find it more convenient to handle the targets this way."

They came to a barred prison-type door. Inside, two club members were having a cup of coffee. One had an electric charge prod, the other a pistol. "Open the door," said Bryan. "Got a live candidate for the

club." To Burlew, he said, "You can see the candidates need a little persuasion. That's Jack with the prod rod and Harry over there has the pistol. We've got the same set-up in the other house."

The man called Jack said, "Come in, Mr. Burlew. You're going to like it here."

Burlew sensed a bit of uneasiness. "Yeah," he said, "I guess I am. You sure have a fine clubhouse."

"No, I mean here." He pointed to a barred opening. "Look at that view of the countryside. Nice, isn't it?"

Burlew's mouth fell open. He looked at Bryan. "Some kind of joke, hah?"

Bryan's voice lost its joviality. "No joke. You're getting what you deserve."

The beet face drained white. "Why?"

"Because of all the senseless slaughter of animals. Because you did it for the fun of it and to prove that you were a man. Because—well because you're evil, cruel, sadistic, that's why."

Burlew made for the door, was stopped by the electric prod.

As the door clanged shut leaving Burlew alone, Bryan called, "Relax, it won't be long. Who knows? You might be lucky and make the hole." ©

— MYSTERY MINQUIZ —

Police officers Toody and Muldoon traveled in what number police car?

From the TV series, they were in Car 54.

What was the secret identity of Frank Chandler?

In the radio series, he was Chandu the Magician.

What was the name of Detective Nick Carter's adopted son?

He was Chick Carter, boy detective.

It was time for a hairy heist—but could they pull it off? If not, there'd be hell toupee!

Mission: Imposterous

by WILLIAM SCHOELL

"AND HERE TO GIVE US THE SPORTS UPDATE IS OUR OLD pal, Chrome-dome, otherwise known as the National Bird. Take it away, Horace, before the light reflecting off your head knocks a satellite out of orbit."

"There he goes again," Tony said to his wife.

He ran his hand back over his shiny bald pate, and sighed. "And he lets him get away with it. Every night that bubble-headed anchorman makes some joke about the sportscaster's bald head, and the guy just sits there and takes it."

Marian put down her knitting and looked through the lower half of her bifocals. "Now, dear. I'm sure it's all in fun. Not everybody is as sensitive about it as you are."

Tony sat upright in his chair. "I'm *not* sensitive, Marian. I'm just tired of all the putdowns we bald guys get—like it's a disease or something. There oughta be a baldie's liberation, I tell you."

Marian raised her brows toward heaven. She had been through all this before.

On the way to the kitchen, she stopped to give his head a peck. "I think bald men are handsome, sexy, virile and intelligent. Isn't that why I married you?"

He took her hand, kissed it. "That Edwards fellow burns me up. Makes more than the president for reading idiot cards on the six o'clock local news. And that hair. That's why they must have hired him. Have you ever seen such hair? I bet he spends two hours before air time whipping it into shape."

"I made brownies," Marian said. "Want a brownie?"

"Huh? No thanks. Get me a beer while you're up."

When she came back with the beer he was still at it. "Bet the bald guy doesn't make as much. 'Not enough hair,' " he recited, " 'not much money.' That's the way it is on TV."

Marian handed him his beer, a bag of pretzels. "You can't expect the sportscaster to make as much as the anchorman. He isn't on as long, for one thing."

"S'pose so." He was about to say something else when the sportscast ended and the anchorman came back on.

"And now as our sportsman Horace Stevens recedes into the distance, we turn our attention . . ."

"Oh, there he goes again. Enough is enough, already."

Even Marian was beginning to think Barry Edwards went too far. "I know it's all in fun, but even so—it is getting tiresome, isn't it? And when you consider that *Edwards* is bald, it really begins to—"

"What? What did you say?"

"Edwards. The anchorman. Edwards is bald, too. That's not his hair. That's a hairpiece."

"Where did you hear this?"

"*The National Indicator*," she said. "They had a list—"

"*Whooppee*. Incredible!"

"—of these Hollywood types and news types who wore wigs or had transplants."

"A darned wig. A rug, he's wearing!"

"—and at the end they had a short paragraph of local names who are somewhat well-known around the country. Edwards was one of them. It even said, 'the anchorman of the WGRD *Six O'Clock Report*,' right there in the paper."

"Edwards wears a rug. What a hypocrite!"

It could be worse, Marian thought. Once she used to wish she had a dollar for every time her husband *apologized* for being bald or made some sort of reference to it. Now he was downright militant on the subject.

She could see his point. Bald men were usually portrayed as being dull, dim-witted and homely—bland, wimpy types. Losers, even. That wasn't what most of the bald men she knew were like, especially not

Tony, who even at forty-five, with his slight pot and reading glasses, was hardly a simpering bookworm. Not with those muscles, anyway. He didn't get as much exercise as he used to since he moved up to management at the plant, but he was still in pretty good shape, considering.

Of course, it seemed like a lot of fuss over nothing to her, simply because baldness in men had never posed any problem as far as she was concerned. She knew that if some women wanted to imply a man was ugly they'd turn up their noses and whine "He's *bald*," but a hairless head had never been either turn-on or turn-off for Marian. If she liked a guy she *liked* a guy . . .

"Tony? What are you thinking, Tony? I don't like that gleam in your eye. *Tony?*"

TONY AND HIS PALS MET AT THE BAR EVERY TUESDAY night for a few drinks, a few laughs. Tony was bursting to tell some of his friends his news. He gathered Joe, Teddy, Bart and Lonnie in the back, let them have the first sip of their assorted poisons, then hit them with his surprise.

"Are you ready for this, guys?"

All eyes were upon him.

"Barry Edwards wears a wig."

A collective gasp. "*What?*"

Joe Turner, the barrel-chested truckdriver, folded his arms and glared meanly. "Y'mean that bozo on the news? The one with all the hair?"

Bart Dudley, pharmacist, nodded affirmatively. "That's the one. The guy who's always making *fun* of baldies, making jokes about Horace Stevens."

"A toup. That's hilarious. And he has the *nerve* to make fun of Stevens." Lonnie, the cleaner, snickered and wiped foam off his lips.

In these men Tony had found like souls. Militant baldies, as his wife called them. They were a kind of informal club. Others referred to them as "the skinheads," but they liked to think of themselves as the Eagles—the Bald Eagles. "If it's good enough for the national bird . . ." was their motto.

"So Barry Edwards wears a wig," Teddy Myers said, shaking his head. "All these years I've worked at WGRD and I never knew it." Teddy was a photographer for the *Six O'Clock Report*. He had only met Edwards a few times, briefly. Edwards stayed safe and warm indoors while Ted ran around town filming reporters as they interviewed celebs and felons.

"Wouldn't it be funny," Lonnie said, "If that wig of his disappeared and he had to go on the air without it?"

"Aww, he must have a dozen," Joe sneered. "Rich guy like that. Celebrity. He wouldn't take no chances being caught without one. And those fancy ones that fool ya are darn expensive, too."

"So maybe somebody could steal *all* his wigs," Tony said.

Everyone was chuckling now. Only Tony took it seriously.

"Yeah, we could get into the place with Teddy's help. Find his dressing room. It just might work at that . . ."

"Are you crazy? That's theft," Lonnie said.

Bart dismissed him. "Nah. Just a gag."

"*Theft.*"

"Are we men or mice?" asked Bart.

Teddy sighed in exasperation. "Are you guys *nuts?*"

"Hey, why not?"

Joe was intrigued. "But *how* . . .?"

"We'd need a plan."

"We'd get caught."

"It's crazy."

"It's *absurd.*"

"Hell, let's do it."

FRIDAY AFTERNOON AT 4 PM TEDDY MYERS WAS BACK IN the WGRD studio earlier than expected. They had had no late-breaking stories, so the crew wasn't needed. He waited until the snackroom was clear, then went to the pay phone and made four calls. It all depended on the other four men being free.

To each man he said, "Today's the day."

Teddy had been asking questions and poking around. No one got suspicious, as his was a familiar face in the studio. He knew what Edwards' routine was during the two hours before air time, knew how many wigs he had, and where they were kept.

Now, if only everyone else remembered what to do.

At 4:25 Lonnie's laundry delivery van drove up into an alley behind the studio. Lonnie had stopped to pick up Tony at his plant. Five minutes later, Joe's privately-owned garbage truck came to a halt behind the van. Out from the cab jumped the driver and Bart, who'd left his pharmacy in the care of his assistant.

Teddy admitted them into the building through the back door. They proceeded quickly to the men's room, where Teddy gave them WGRD service men's uniforms.

At 4:40 Teddy signed out from work. He had done his part. It would

be better if he were not on the premises when the theft took place.

The men had been carefully briefed, and knew in which direction to go. They strode authoritatively, knowing the more purposeful they looked, the less chance there would be of anybody challenging them.

At the end of the corridor leading to the dressing rooms, Lonnie suddenly clutched his chest and staggered.

As if bucking for an Oscar, the cleaner proceeded to have the most convincing "heart attack" anyone had ever seen. For a moment the other boys thought he might not be faking. They hurried down the corridor while other people in the hall rushed over to Lonnie's side. "Get a doctor," someone yelled.

4:50. They would have to take care of Edwards' make-up-lady/hairdresser, as well as his personal secretary. Joe knocked on the door to dressing room 4 and shouted, "Judy Turner. Judy Turner!"

Miss Turner, the make-up-girl/hairdresser, poked her head out. "Yes, what is it?"

"You got license number 327 ALC?" Teddy had found it out for them, of course.

"Yes?"

"Well, you had a little accident, lady. Leastways, I did. My truck jumped a curve, totalled your car—"

"What?"

"Better come with me, lady."

She grabbed her hat and coat. "Be right back, Barry," she called as she followed Joe down the hall. They rushed past the people attending to Lonnie, and out the station's front door.

So far so good.

TONY AND BART ENTERED THE EMPTY DRESSING ROOM next door and pretended to fix a light switch until it was nearly five o'clock. Out on the street Miss Turner would soon discover that nothing was wrong with her car, and Joe would simply run off out of sight. She might be a fast walker, but the lot where her car was parked was several blocks away.

At 5:00 Edwards' personal secretary usually finished taking dictation in his dressing room and went to her office to type the man's correspondence. Today she was right on schedule. She left the dressing room and disappeared around the corner.

Out in the hall a doctor was bending over Lonnie's prostrate form. Bart knocked on Edwards' dressing room door.

"Come in."

The anchorman sat in front of the mirror, picking at a spot on his

chin. "What do you want?"

"Got report the lights weren't working," Bart said in his sweatiest grumble. He and Tony advanced into the room.

"The lights are perfectly—"

A handkerchief shot out from Bart's pocket. Quickly he clamped it over Edwards' face. Ten seconds later the newsman was asleep. The pharmacist had known which chemical would do the trick safely.

"Lock the door, Tony," Bart barked.

Tony did so. He went to the cabinet in the corner, took out his tools. The cabinet was padlocked. Been a long time since he'd had to work with his hands, not since he'd moved up to management, and it felt good. He carefully pried open the cabinet. "Here they are," he stage-whispered.

There were six wavy wigs inside the drawer. The two men stuffed three of them apiece inside their shirts. "Edwards lives way out in the suburbs," Tony laughed. "Even if he has more wigs at his house, they'd never get them here in time."

They opened the door to the corridor cautiously. "We'll be long gone before he wakes up." They heard a commotion from the end of the hall. Lonnie, that Sarah Bernhardt, was screaming and shaking like an epileptic. Obviously the crowd had begun to disperse too soon, so he'd figured a little psycho-drama might serve to hold them spellbound. It was working. No one saw Tony or Bart as they made their way toward the back exit.

"Oh no!" Bart slammed his hand onto his forehead. "We have to go back!"

Tony swore. "Why, Bart? We got the wigs."

"*Not the one he had on.*"

Lonnie was still screaming when they got back to the dressing room. Maybe something was really wrong with him.

They went back into Dressing Room 4. Edwards was stirring, beginning to revive.

"*Hurry.*"

"Let me have the honors," Tony said. He went over and pulled the wig off the man's head. Not only was Edwards bald—he was *bald as an eagle*—just a little fringe around the sides and absolutely *nothing* on top. At least Tony had a few strands left. "Look at the guy! And he makes fun of Horace Stevens!"

Tony threw Bart the wig. He stuck it inside his shirt.

"Flatten it down," Tony told him. "You look like you have a bosom."

Bart groaned and pounded his chest like Tarzan. "Okay?"

"Okay."

They were out in the corridor when they heard Edwards screaming.

"My hair. What have they done to my hair?"

The people surrounding Lonnie looked up. Seizing the opportunity, Lonnie got to his feet, said he was feeling much better to those few who were still paying attention, and walked rapidly toward the front door.

Tony and Bart went to the back exit as quickly as possible, hoping no one would notice them in the pandemonium Edwards' shouting had caused.

A crowd had gathered around Edwards' dressing room. The door opened. A funny-looking bald man who seemed somehow familiar peeked out and began to holler. People in the corridor stared in shock, then amusement. En masse, they began to laugh.

"My hair!" Edwards screeched. "Where is my hair?"

OUT IN THE ALLEY JOE WAS WAITING FOR THEM.

"What happened to Miss Turner?"

Joe smiled. "I pretended they'd towed my truck away. I kept pointing out dents in her car that weren't there. I made a big deal out of it. 'Can't you see—the paint is scratched there. Can't you see?' I said. First she thought I was exaggerating, then she thought I was nuts. She must be back at the studio by now."

Bart and Tony ran to the van. Lonnie came walking around from the front of the building, and got into the truck with Joe. The two vehicles drove away into rush hour traffic.

"Yahoo!" Tony screamed. "We did it!"

He waved the anchorman's wig in the air.

"THE WGRD SIX O'CLOCK REPORT. TONIGHT SUBSTITUTING for Barry Edwards, is Ralph Vinio."

"Tony, what have you been smiling about? Something's happened. Will you tell me?"

Tony sipped his beer, but said nothing.

"Hmmm. At least you won't have to be subjected to Edwards' remarks tonight. He's not on. Must be sick."

"Oh, he's sick all right. And he'll be sick until someone makes him up another custom-made rug."

"What did you say?"

Tony couldn't resist. He went to the bedroom, opened the drawer, and came back with a full, thick mop of wavy brown tresses.

"Oh My God! Where did you get *that*?"

"Hairstyle look familiar?"

"Oh my God!"

She sat on his lap and kissed his beautiful baby head. "Throw that rug in the garbage, you don't know where it's been," she said.

He told her what had happened.

And there was an added surprise.

"Look, Tony. The substitute anchorman. Ralph Vinio."

"What about him?"

"Look. You'll like him."

Vinio's head was as smooth and pretty as a baby's bare behind. ●

MYSTERY MINQUIZ

What famous police detective took his orders from Chief Brandon?

The comic strip's strong-jawed Dick Tracy.

In A. Conan Doyle's story "The Adventure of the Empty House," who was Professor Moriarty's partner?

Called the second most dangerous man in London, he was Colonel Sebastian Moran.

What do Warner Baxter, Ray Collins, House Jameson, Everett Sloane, and John McIntire have in common?

They all played Dr. Ordway in the radio and movie series Crime Doctor.

What do D.B. Cooper and James Fenimore Cooper have in common?

The same last name.

This time her husband had gone too far. She was going to leave—but first she had to say goodbye, in a way that he'd never forget!

Seamstress

by CHARLOTTE BROWN

THE MULBERRY BRUISE BELOW HER LEFT EYE IS THE worst. Well, the most apparent, at any rate, she amends. Not the most painful, by a long shot.

Winona Millard surveys her image in the ornate, gilt-framed mirror on the wall of the spacious bedroom she shares with her husband. Dark hair hangs in tangled loops about her face and shoulders, surrounding a bloodless, stricken face she scarcely recognizes. Her eyes, deeply set above high arching cheekbones, show only slim circles of brown iris around the dilated pupils. Mascara and green eye shadow, painstakingly applied a few hours ago, are caked and smeared from the tears she couldn't control. And from her husband's fists.

Her gaze shifts downward to the jade gown partially encasing her slender body. Her right shoulder is exposed, pale skin gleaming through the shredded silken threads where Olin's fingers have ripped the delicate fabric.

Flinching at a quick, bright stab of pain beneath her ribs, Winona gingerly slides open the zipper and draws the whispering material over her head. She drops the dress on the floor beside the dressing table. Small, cautious movements release the bra, shrug it from her shoulders, slip the nylon panties to her ankles. She kicks the garments away, intent on studying the masses of fresh purple contusions blooming on her breasts, ribs, stomach and thighs.

A sudden impulse causes her to pick up the hand mirror, pivot, and examine her buttocks in the double reflection. The network of lines traversing her rump and back, so vividly scarlet two days ago, have faded now to a sullen rose. She grimaces and replaces the mirror on the glass top of the mahogany dresser.

Hands on hips, feet spread, she stares at the young woman in the mirror. One swollen eyelid droops to produce a wink. She straightens her spine, throws back her aching shoulders, and grins.

"That's all, Olin," she murmurs. "You outdid yourself this time, you bastard."

The eyes of the mirrored woman still appear wild and glittering. Fear-crazed. *The mirror is lying, she thinks. I'm not scared now. I'm calm. Really, I am. The beating is over with and that was the final one. There will be no more beatings. And I know what I have to do, so those lunatic eyes can't be mine.*

She holds her hands out, eyeing them, expecting them to display a steadiness that doesn't exist. She shrugs.

"We've had it, kiddo," she announces loudly, not sure whether she's addressing her image or her husband.

Winona shakes her head impatiently, swings around and hurries across the room to her closet. Dressing hastily, she remembers to slap a careless covering of makeup on the facial bruises. That's better. Not completely disguised, but an improvement.

Too short to reach the upper shelf, even in high heels, she kicks off her shoes and drags a chair back to the closet. Standing on the velvet seat, she reaches up and pulls a large suitcase from the top shelf. She spreads the case open on the bed and begins to work rapidly. Dumps the contents of dresser drawers into its yawning cavity; drags dresses, blouses, jackets, designer jeans from padded hangers and slings them into the valise. Shoes, cosmetics, toothbrush, a tiny, enameled travel clock, a few pieces of jewelry. Many garments remain in the closet when the case is full. With another shrug, she slams the lid shut and snaps the latches.

Downstairs she dumps the bag in the foyer, slings her leather handbag next to it, then pauses to check her appearance in the oval mirror near the door. *Not too bad*, she thinks. So who's to notice a few bruises, anyhow? She squares her shoulders, takes a deep breath and heads for the living room. She'll call a cab from the extension there.

And say good-by to Olin.

HE HASN'T MOVED, OF COURSE. HE'S STILL SPRAWLED ON the brocade couch where he collapsed a half hour ago. Or was it an

hour ago? She glances at her watch. *Two hours. We came home from the Kirklands' party shortly after midnight and that's when he pitched his tantrum and it's after two now. My goodness, time flies when you're having fun.*

A muscle twitches in rhythmic spasms at the corner of Olin's right eye.

She strolls toward him, wishing to project nonchalance, but aware of the tremor in her navy panted legs. She doesn't know what to do with her hands. They hang at her sides like fluttering moths. She jams them into her jacket pockets in an effort to stop their shaking.

"I'm leaving now, Olin." She wrinkles her nose in distaste at the sandpaper quality of her voice. She runs a gritty tongue over the roof of her mouth.

A drop of spittle forms on Olin's drooping lower lip.

"Too bad about the stroke, Doctor Millard. But it's your own fault, you know. You're too old to get so riled!"

Olin's pale grey eyes stab icicles into Winona, following her as she takes one baby-side-step in the direction of the telephone table, then hovers in irresolution. *What is this? Captain-May-I? Why can't I take my eyes off him,* she wonders. *I don't need his permission or approval for anything now. Don't need it, don't want it.*

Fidgeting fingers emerge from her pockets to fumble with the buttons on her navy blazer. One of them hangs loosely, suspended from a single restraining thread.

"Oh-oh! Guess I'd better sew this back on," she giggles inanely. "After all your lessons in *How To Be A Proper Lady*, Olin, I mustn't go traipsing around with a loose button, must I? Uh-uh. That's a no-no, isn't it, sweetheart?"

Icy eyes in a slack, distorted face track her as she fetches her sewing basket from a low table and pokes its contents for a needle and thread. She draws a leather hassock close to her husband and perches primly on its tufted top, basket on the floor beside her. Removing her jacket, smoothing it neatly on her lap, she chats quietly.

"This is what you like, isn't it, Olin? Having your sweet, obedient little wifey near you, me doing domestic things while you relax from your busy, stressful day. Right, Doctor Millard?"

His long, clever fingers are draped uselessly over the ivory brocade cushions. As she threads her needle, she thinks she glimpses a fractional movement. *Yes, there it goes again.* The forefinger on his right hand rises a millimeter, then falls back into its original position.

"You know, I hate needlework, Olin. Always did. Despise the stupid embroidery you insisted I learn to do."

Her own fingers tremble slightly as she inserts the needle into the blue fabric of her jacket.

"Took you off the streets and gave you everything a woman could ever desire," Winona mimics in a pseudo baritone. *"Made a lady out of you. Wonderful life, beautiful clothes, lovely home, least you can do is show your gratitude by obliging me in my little whims."*

Olin's jutting chin, resting on his collar bone, is decorated by a miniature stream of saliva. The shiny drops of spit dribble sluggishly from stubbled grey skin to rumpled necktie.

"Well, I surely did oblige you, doctor. And you had lots and lots of little whims, didn't you?"

Her needle, playing hide-and-seek with the dark fabric, flicks darting little silvery patterns into the soft glow of lamplight. She glances up. Olin's cold glare is fixed permanently on her face. She wonders vaguely if he understands anything she is saying.

"Oh yes, I know what you want, dear," she says earnestly. "I'm supposed to summon an ambulance, a crew of paramedics, a specialist to examine you—you probably want Brad Kirkland, don't you? Isn't he the best in the field?"

She knots the thread and snips it off with her little embroidery scissors. She examines her handiwork, nods her satisfaction, and dons the repaired jacket. Then, reaching for her sewing basket, she sets it on her lap and digs among the skeins of floss, the packets of needles, the spools and scraps.

"Something else I must do before I call that taxi," she mumbles seizing the object of her search.

SHE HOLDS UP A THICK, CURVING TAPESTRY NEEDLE, inspecting its glistening, tapering beauty, admiring its pure utilitarian design.

"Brad Kirkland doesn't appeal to me, Olin. I wasn't flirting with him at the party. He was telling me about the problems they're having with that kid of theirs and I was simply trying to be sympathetic. I felt sorry for him."

Winona probes the depths of the sewing basket again and comes up with a silver thimble, which she places on her middle finger.

"But you wouldn't believe me, of course. Not you. You took me home and beat the hell out of me, didn't you, darling? Just another of your little whims, right, duckie?"

She prods the jumble of floss with a finger that no longer trembles.

"What color?" she asks, glancing at the grotesque, motionless hulk that is her husband. His staring eyes seem to flicker and one lid gives a

twitch, then settles at half-mast. *And he used to be such a handsome man*, she thinks, shaking her head. *So distinguished looking.*

"Magenta. We'll start with magenta," she decides, disentangling the skein of vivid floss from the others.

"It wasn't just the physical cruelty, you know. I mean it's not very nice to be locked in a room without food for a week, and I never did like your whips and belts and all that other sadistic garbage. Sure, the injuries healed, although some of them left scars that'll never go away. But it was the mental torture, I guess, that hurt the most," she says reflectively.

Deftly, she plunges the heavy needle into its target and gently pulls the gossamer fiber taut.

"*Stupid slut,*" she croaks in the pretend baritone voice she uses to mimic him. "*Incompetent whore! Can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear. Can't teach a street urchin to be a lady. Must be one of the unteachables I.Q. of 75, at best.*"

Her needle weaves in and out, urged by the sturdy insistence of the thimble. Her stitches are small and neat and evenly spaced. The length of magenta thread is used up. She ties it off.

"And then after the beatings and the castigations, you'd cry sometimes, Olin. Beg my forgiveness, promise never to do it again. That was the weirdest part of all—because you'd be so convincing and so pathetic that I'd find myself believing you and comforting you. Ha!" she barks. "What a crock!"

Her words are drops of acid spilled on the silent surface of the night. She plucks another skein from the rainbow of colors.

"Jonquil now. It needs some livening up." She threads her scimitar-shaped needle again.

"And I was so much in awe of you, Olin. You really had me persuaded that I was too dumb, too inferior to ever make it out there on my own. But now I think you're wrong, darling. I think I've got more brains than you gave me credit for. After all, I did learn to speak properly and to use a needle efficiently. You have to give me credit for that much, sweetie."

Winona becomes aware of another gleaming drop of moisture trekking its way down the crevices of Olin's face. A tear. Slithering away from its twitching source. She brushes it away with her knuckles, wondering if more will follow. Hoping not. She might not be able to stand that, might not be able to finish her task if he weeps. She searches, sees no more tears welling, ready to fall. His eyes are glinting chunks of ice, lumps of fury in the melting grey husk of surrounding flesh.

"Just a little turquoise now, Olin, and perhaps a touch of indigo. Be patient. I'm almost finished."

Absorbed in fashioning the design she's inventing, intent on directing the needle, with its frail burden of silken floss, to do her bidding, she chats only sporadically now.

"Three years with you, Doctor Millard. Seems more like three centuries, if you want to know the truth. Sometimes I feel like a creaky old woman. Sometimes I have to force myself to believe I'm only twenty. Your 'child bride,' as your middle-aged friends like to call me!"

SHE WOULD USE HER CREDIT CARD, FLY TO SOME OTHER big city, dye her hair, assume a different name, get a job, a decent job this time, as a receptionist maybe. Start a fresh life. No more topless dancing. That's how this nightmare had begun, how he'd found her to begin with. The fine, rich, successful plastic surgeon, Dr. Olin Millard, trying to play Pygmalion. Ha. The loony-as-a-jay-bird plastic surgeon, more like, and that's no joke.

"Just a few finishing touches now. You've been a good boy, Olin."

She extracts a strand of pink floss, threads it through the eye of the needle, and continues with her sewing, forcing the gleaming instrument in and out, in and out with a soothing rhythm.

"Heaven only knows when you'll be found, darling. Mrs. Terry doesn't come to clean until Monday and this is only Saturday." Not until the words are spoken does she notice that dawn is sifting through the open curtains at the far end of the room. She blinks.

"It's Sunday morning. I stand corrected!"

She whips up the small embroidery scissors, cuts the thread, then pauses, deliberating. His gaze is riveted to the sharp silvery points hovering near his eyes.

"Tell you what, Olin. Soon as I get to the airport, I'll call Brad Kirkland and tell him you've had a stroke. He'll take care of everything."

She tosses the scissors into the basket, stands up, yawns, stretches her limbs, then regrets the gross movement. She'd almost forgotten how sore she is.

After calling for a taxi, she smooths her hair, blows a kiss at Olin, and says, "*Caio*, darling. It's been—interesting."

IN THE FOYER, WITH THE LIVING ROOM DOOR CLOSED, she sags against the wall opposite the mirror. The pretty, neatly dressed woman in the mirror smiles back at her. She looks fine. A bit tired

perhaps. A little pale. But otherwise she looks okay.

Except, why do her eyes still hold that creepy, frantic look?

Then, hearing the taxi pull up and honk, she slings her bag over her shoulder, hefts the heavy suitcase, and hurries out.

Olin, motionless on the couch in the living room, hears his young wife slam the door. The muscle beneath his eye jumps crazily, incessantly. He wishes it would stop. But that is not his greatest concern.

He wishes frantically that he could swallow the pool of saliva collecting in his mouth.

The magenta stitches with which Winona sealed his mouth do leak a bit, but Olin, terrified of drowning in his own juices, cannot feel the minute dribbles of moisture sliding down his chin.

Nor can he feel the yellow daisies embroidered on his chin and cheeks, his forehead and nose. He can't feel the clumsy pink stitches resembling roses or the turquoise appliques that may or may not be butterflies, depending on the perception of the viewer. He is unaware of the bloody smears where the needle has left its tracks, turning the brilliant colors of the embroidery floss to dirty rust in places.

As his drool and sweat mix with the blood on his dead grey visage, Olin hopes dimly that the little slut makes it to the airport in time to make that call.

“What is the meaning of it . . . ? What object is served by this circle of misery and violence and fear? It must tend to some end, or else our universe is ruled by chance, which is unthinkable. But what end? There is the great standing perennial problem to which human reason is as far from an answer as ever.”

—Sherlock Holmes
THE CARDBOARD BOX

Merchandise was missing from Kathy's department, so of course she was suspected. But how could she prove she was not a thief?

DOLLARS AND SCENTS

by ROLLE R. RAND

THEY WERE ACTUALLY SPYING ON HER, KATHY WINSLOW thought worriedly. She could feel the weightless scrutiny of her fellow employees brush against her from their respective stations within Countess Tania's silver-and-pink brocaded salon. Slowly, disbelievingly, Kathy realized their vigil was prompted by their combined conviction that *she* was the elusive thief, that she was the insider who, within the past eight weeks, had systematically stolen sixteen thousand dollars worth of designer dresses. And from her very own department!

In a way, she couldn't blame them, Kathy admitted grudgingly to herself. The first theft, a Givenchy, hadn't occurred until a week *after* she had started to work. Then a Trigere and a de la Renta had disappeared, both on the same day, followed shortly by a Halston and a Geoffrey Beene. When a Scaasi and a St. Laurent vanished in swift succession, a pattern appeared obvious: someone was making a career of stealing two, occasionally three, designer creations a week from Countess Tania, but only during those hours while Kathy was at work.

She tensed as Wanda Thorpe moved out from her perfume counter toward the dress displays. A former movie star on the dark side of forty, Wanda Thorpe still hoped for a comeback, though it had been fifteen years since her last picture. Each day during her lunch hour she departed in her faded finery to continue her hopeless round of producers' offices. A new wardrobe to a has-been actress could mean . . . Wanda sent a lofty smile toward Kathy, then veered toward the employees' lounge.

Kathy stared briefly at the retreating back. Her thoughtful gaze traveled across the large black-and-white squares of the highly-polished floor toward the rest of what the Countess called, "My children." There was Miss Mullin, *Accessories*, a not-so-gay divorcee in constant need of money for the several young men in her life. In a small alcove nearby, surrounded by gift items for men, Gladys Szigny advised wives on what masculine presents to get to help cushion the shock when their husbands finally saw Countess Tania's bill. Across the aisle, before a life-size marble statue of Aphrodite, Ronald Bruce held sway in the midst of lacy clouds of lingerie which, for some Freudian reason, he still insisted calling "Unmentionables."

"This is our Miss Winslow." Kathy recognized the voice behind her as Jeffrey Coulter's, floor manager for the Countess. As she turned about, Coulter said, "Kathy, meet Mrs. William Miller of Lufkin, Texas. This is her first visit with us, but Mrs. Miller comes well recommended. Mrs. Miller is to have whatever she desires, without question, the complete courtesy of this establishment."

"Certainly, Mr. Coulter," Kathy said, but Coulter already was moving toward the nubile Gladys Szigny. Kathy glanced at Mrs. Miller and immediately liked what she saw: a round-faced, brown-haired woman in her thirties, possessing an excellent figure almost successfully concealed by a boxy tweed suit.

"It's 'Blanche,' if I may call you 'Kathy,'" Mrs. Miller suggested smilingly. She nodded toward where Jeffrey Coulter and Gladys Szigny now were engaged in eye-to-eye conversation. "I don't think I'd like to work with him. He smells too sweet, like ribbon cane syrup. Same with that fluttery little feller there in *lingerie*. I agree with my husband, Bill: there are male scents and female scents; a man ought to smell like a man, a woman like a woman. Take you, Kathy. You smell nice, but it doesn't knock you down. Now if only I could look as you do in just basic black and a single strand of pearls, I wouldn't have to spend fifteen minutes in this place."

"You're very kind—uh—Blanche," Kathy murmured, thinking, what a character, but a nice character.

Mrs. Miller surveyed her surroundings. "We have nothing like this in Lufkin, Texas; maybe in Houston, but Lufkin has a little way to go. So, show me something so expensive it will give my husband a false cardiac arrest, but so sexy it will make him forget the price. I want a dress that could get me barred—but not quite—from the country club, the kind of dress the Countess would wear if she had a mind to go out and try to seduce Tom Selleck."

"Have you met the Countess?" Kathy asked.

Mrs. Miller shook her head. "No. I'd like to. The president of our bank gave me a letter to her, really just a credit reference, but I want to be sure the dress I select would be something the Countess herself would wear."

Kathy said hesitantly, "But the Countess doesn't wear dresses."

"She doesn't? Why not? Seems kind of disloyal since she sells them."

BEFORE KATHY COULD REPLY, A LARGE FIGURE WITH A surprisingly light step came toward them, two hundred fifty pounds of male flesh encased in a Norfolk jacket.

"I am the Countess Tania, aka Irving Nussbaum," the man introduced himself. "You must be the Mrs. Miller Jeffrey Coulter told me about."

Mrs. Miller did not try to hide her surprise. "You sure don't look much like a countess, more like a linebacker for the Dallas Cowboys."

"It goes with the territory," Irving Nussbaum said. "I could say you don't look much like a Texan—no boots, no big hat—but I forgive you."

"I forgive you, too, 'Countess,'" Mrs. Miller said, sniffing the air critically, because I like your scent. You smell like a man, not rotting heliotrope."

Irving Nussbaum laughed delightedly. "Mrs. Miller, you have made my day. Now let our Kathy Winslow advise you on how to spend a lot of your money."

Kathy followed orders implicitly. She started at the top, and ended at the top. Mrs. Miller bought the first two items Kathy had brought out for her: one, a black gown with a silver beaded belt and banded silver hem, featuring a deep teardrop neckline and silver scarf; the other, a sheer gold lace see-through blouson.

"My husband will kill me, but by getting two maybe I'll get to keep one," Mrs. Miller said. Then, hesitantly, "I can return them if necessary, can't I?"

Remembering Jeffrey Coulter's instructions, Kathy said, "No

problem. Will there be anything else? Perhaps some perfume?"

Mrs. Miller nodded vigorously. "The best, and a lot. I'll drown myself in it when I model my new clothes for Bill. If that doesn't turn him on, at least it will be one thing he can't make me take back."

Kathy guided Mrs. Miller to the perfumery where Wanda Thorpe was waiting languidly behind the counter. Even the normally blase Wanda was visibly impressed when Mrs. Miller purchased a half-liter flagon of *Joie de Vivre*, reputedly among the three most expensive perfumes in the world.

Kathy asked, "Would you like your purchases delivered to your hotel?"

"I don't want these goodies out of my hot little hands," Mrs. Miller said firmly. "Thank you, but they go with me . . ."

THE NEXT MORNING, ARRIVING AT WORK, KATHY WAS surprised to find Mrs. Miller waiting for her.

"Here." Mrs. Miller thrust the two dress boxes at her, adding anxiously, "You did say I could return them. Remember? I don't think I hurt them just trying them on for Bill. But he did enjoy the style show, short as it was."

Kathy placed the boxes on a white antique table, peeped at the dresses; they seemed all right, perhaps a little wrinkled, nothing a light iron couldn't cure.

"What happened? Bill didn't like them?"

"He liked the perfume more," Mrs. Miller said, blushing. "So much, we're going on a second honeymoon. To Paris. He said to bring these dresses back and he'd get me some *real* ones over there. Right where they're made, and the sky's the limit."

Kathy was tempted to debate this point; instead, she remarked, "Bill seems like quite a fellow."

"He is. The best," Mrs. Miller assured her, somewhat defensively. "You ever get to Lufkin, Texas, come see us."

"I'll do that," Kathy said, trying to push the thought of lost commissions from her mind as she accompanied Mrs. Miller to the front door. "Have fun in Paris."

Any thoughts of lost commissions swiftly vanished when Kathy returned to the antique table to collect the dresses. The dresses were gone! Boxes and all!

CASTING FRANTIC GLANCES ALL ABOUT THE SALON, SHE did not know whether to weep, swear, bite her nails, or spit. With Mrs. Miller's departure, Countess Tania's was devoid of all clients; ten a.m.

was at least an hour too early for their average customer. Kathy could see Wanda Thrope morosely eyeing a newly-found wrinkle in a magnifying mirror. Jeffrey Coulter and Gladys Szigny were sharing a loving cup of coffee. Ronald Bruce, with unwanted advice from Miss Mullin, was arranging a lace chemisette across the bust of a display mannequin. Countess Tania, as was his custom, was making morning rounds adjusting dresses, lighting, drapes, even pillows.

"Help!" Kathy screamed. Cupping her hands about her mouth, again: "Help!"

A moment's startled silence, then they all came running. In spite of his bulk, Countess Tania—aka Irving Nussbaum—was the first to arrive.

"What is it, Kathy?" he demanded worriedly. "You all right?"

Kathy pointed at the antique table. "Mrs. Miller's dresses. The ones she bought yesterday and just returned: They're gone!" Then—thinking, what do I have to lose—she said more or less calmly, "Someone here in this room stole them, that same someone who has been stealing from Countess Tania right along. But the dresses are still on the premises. There hasn't been time enough to dispose of them."

"Jeffrey!" Countess Tania bellowed. "Lock the doors. Nobody leaves until we get to the bottom of this." As Coulter hastened to comply, the Countess fixed his gaze on Kathy. "You've made a very serious allegation, young lady. For your sake, you'd better be right. Remember, all the missing dresses were from your department."

Kathy could feel the combined focus of their eyes—angry, shocked, hurt—coming at her like laser beams. She felt literally surrounded, yet utterly alone. In spite of her best efforts, the unwanted tears began their slow trickle down her cheeks. She wailed disgustedly, "Oh, shoot!"

Countess Tania placed a soothing arm about her shoulders. "There, there, Kathy, that's not necessary. It won't help."

Abruptly, Kathy twisted away from him as Jeffrey Coulter returned. She began to sniff the air inquisitively, going from Coulter to Wanda Thorpe, to Gladys Szigny, to Ronald Bruce, to Miss Mullin. With a little squeal of excitement, she turned again to Countess Tania, threw her arms about his neck and buried her face against his chest. Then she drew back, a knowing smile on her face.

"You're the one. It's been you all the time." Kathy pointed a trembling forefinger at Countess Tania. "You're the thief!"

"Have you lost your mind?" Countess Tania demanded, his face reddening.

"You're out of your skull, Kathy," Jeffrey Coulter snapped.

Kathy swallowed hard. Lord, let me be right, she prayed silently. She said, "I don't know why you stole the dresses from yourself, but you did. You've got them on you now, inside your jacket. Go ahead. Open your jacket. I dare you."

Countess Tania said harshly, "I don't have to stand for this nonsense."

"Humor the girl, Irving," Jeffrey Coulter suggested. "Prove she's wrong."

Countess Tania looked about at the expectant faces of his employees. He frowned, bit at his lower lip, then shrugged as he seemed to arrive at a decision. Unbuttoning his jacket, he took it off and removed the two dresses pinned to the lining, handed these to Coulter, then turned to face his "children."

"I am so ashamed. I think of each of you as my 'family,' so I hope you'll understand," he explained apologetically. "Business has been good enough, but my gambling hasn't. I lost too much money. So I used the insurance money I collected for the missing dresses, then bootlegged the garments, to help pay off my losses. It's that simple, and so am I. But I'll pay it all back. And your jobs are safe. I swear."

AS THE COUNTESS WALKED DEJECTEDLY TOWARD HIS office, Kathy's fellow employees crowded excitedly about her, offering congratulations, all with the same question. Jeffrey Coulter raised his voice above the babble: "How did you know it was Irving, Kathy? How did you know he had the dresses on him?"

"It was a matter of the scents not making sense, if you'll forgive the unintentional pun." She smiled at their obvious puzzlement. "After selecting the two dresses, Mrs. Miller purchased a large bottle of *Joie de Vivre*, a perfume most of us here can't afford, and wouldn't wear to work if we could. She told me she was going to 'drown' herself in the *Joie de Vivre* when she showed off her new clothes to her husband. As you know, most superior perfumes have a distinctive, clinging scent that lasts. So when the Countess hid the dresses on his person, he also acquired the scent that came with them. And no one would combine a man's cologne with a lady's perfume, certainly not on purpose."

Jeffrey Coulter reached for Kathy, but Wanda Thorpe embraced her first. Wanda said, "Come, darling. Let's have coffee while I tell you all about my last picture."

It was a drinking society and a golfing group combined, and there were five members—until that fateful day the judge fell and was killed. Was it an accident—or murder?

On The Rocks

by JOE L. HENSLEY

THAT WAS THE LATE SUMMER DAY LATER REMEMBERED at the club as the time five golfers went out for eighteen and only four came back after the first nine holes.

Sheriff Barger was one of the four survivors. He sat at a table in the bar with the other three.

"Now," he said, "I want to know exactly where everyone was when Judge Hinshaw fell into the sharp rocks near the ninth hole?"

The ambulance had come and gone. It had entered the drive of the country club with red lights on and siren screaming, startling the children in the swimming pool, but it had left silently enough. *No need to hurry*, Barger thought.

"I lost my ball farther down the creek," Edwards, the newspaper editor said. "It's not so steep down there and I saw it and went down for it." He sighed gustily. "I was hooking everything again. When the judge screamed I was trying to dig the ball out with a two iron and wishing I had some contraption like you carry, sheriff, you know that telescoping thingamajig with a ball retriever on the end." He nodded. "All this and the triple bogie I took on the seventh hole have made me very nervous and thirsty. I'd like to have a drink. Can't we please have a drink now?"

Sheriff Barger relented. He didn't want them drunk and babbling, but he was thirsty himself. "Maybe one drink."

Edwards nodded up at Jan, the brown-eyed girl who usually tended bar stoically on Wednesdays and Saturdays when the Jug Finders played.

"I'll have a see-through-screw, Jan." He smiled. He was a thin man, very devious, the poorest golfer in the group, but one who planned every shot to take maximum advantage of his failings. Because of the hook he drove off tees facing at about twenty degrees away from his hoped for line of flight.

"Make it a double since we're limited to one," Edwards added.

George Dart, the happy dentist, nodded. "Double that double order, Jan." He looked at Sheriff Barger. All the men at the table were in their fifties, sixties, or early seventies and they'd played golf together for a long time. The Jug Finders was a drinking society in addition to being a golfing group. On the course they fought each other for every dollar that went into the communal drinking pot, exultant about good holes, despondent about bad ones.

"How about you, doc?"

"I was, as usual, in the woods. I'd sliced my second shot, also as usual. I didn't even hear the scream, but I'm getting a trifle hard of hearing."

That was true, Sheriff Barger thought. *Dart could occasionally hear a loud clap of thunder. But he had sharp eyes.*

"Did you see anything?"

"I came out and saw you all standing there and then saw Judge Hinshaw in the rocks." He looked at Barger. "Are you sure he was dead, sheriff?"

"I'd stake my life on it," the fourth man said. He was a retired

lawyer-banker who owned a chain of theatres. He was full of bright, sometimes dry remarks and he'd hated Judge Hinshaw enough to take a series of lessons from the pro to improve his game so as hopefully to beat the judge, Barger remembered. His name was Walter Rose.

"Where were you, Walter?" Barger asked.

Rose nodded at Jan to bring him another drink. He'd evaded Barger's semi-order not to drink by getting a lemonade and then having Jan dump a double of gin into it. He'd claimed he needed it because of his "cough."

"I was in the cart. My second shot was over the creek. After I'd managed that with my trusty three wood I drove dutifully back and rang the bell so the group behind us could tee off. I think I may have heard the poor judge scream, but he'd been screaming and cheating for years and I didn't think much about it." He shrugged. "I didn't even bother to look."

Barger looked up at the pictures on the wall of the bar. There golfers clad in the clothes of their times stood proudly holding cups won for skill on the course. One could look long and far and discover few Jug Finders. They'd ritually be found in the bar bemoaning their luck when such winner's pictures were taken.

"As I recall," Sheriff Barger said to Rose, "you threatened the judge when we were playing the third hole?"

"You know what he was doing?" Rose asked intently. "He hit his drive into the pines on the right. When I saw him, he was kicking it out into a good lie where he'd have an open second shot. Then he failed to count at least one shot he had on his adventurous way to the green. I saw him put down a five and he had a six at best."

"We should have made him quit keeping score long ago," Doctor Dart said. "He'd gotten into a new habit of subtracting a stroke from his score on a hole or two. Critical holes."

Edwards nodded. His fingertips were blue from printer's ink and Sheriff Barger thought he remembered seeing a smudge like that on Judge Hinshaw's yellow golf shirt.

"He was a genius with numbers, with misfiguring them, I mean. None of us ever understood how he figured things out and so we let him keep doing it and paid what he announced."

JAN PICKED THAT MOMENT TO BRING THE DRINKS. SHE handed Barger his Lite and set the rest of the drinks on the table. Her voice was soft, but firm. "I'll tell you another thing he was doing. He'd come in with you guys and take charge of the money and then he'd pocket some of it. He'd tell you he'd tipped me when he hadn't. All the

time he'd be pinching me every time I got in range. I know you guys use all the money you lose to buy drinks, but it wasn't happening that way." She shook her head. "He was the cheapo to end all cheapos."

"Were you here in the clubhouse all afternoon?" Barger asked her.

"No, but I wasn't out on the course or one of you would have surely seen me." Jan gave them her best, gamin smile. "I was doing what I was doing, but not with Judge Hinshaw. Dirty old man is what he was."

"All of us are that," Edwards admitted uncomfortably.

Jan smiled cryptically. "There are sexy senior golfers and there are dirty old men. I count you boys in the former group. I counted Judge Hinshaw in the latter." She shook her head firmly. "He made a pass at every woman who was dumb enough to get within 'gimmee range'."

"Makes me glad I'm single," Barger said.

"You're the only one who is. The rest of us and our wives have had to put up with his beastly ways for years," Rose said.

Sheriff Barger made his decision. "It has to have been an accident. If any of us had done it one of the others would have seen it. I was out of sight of him on top of the creek when he went in. Too bad it had to be at that one real bad spot where all the jagged rocks are. It sure tore him up."

"He stole golf balls, too," Doctor Dart mused. "On eight I'm certain he played my ball instead of his own. He wasn't that way when he started with us, was he?"

"Sort of," Edwards said. "He kept getting worse. Not only had his golf deteriorated, but my wife said he made a very firm pass at her the last time we went off on a golfing weekend."

"So did mine," Doctor Dart said, startled.

"Who's going to tell Mrs. Hinshaw?" Edwards asked.

"She knows," Jan said from behind the bar. "One of the other ladies came in from the course and said Ruth Hinshaw had gone to the funeral home to pick out a casket. She seemed to be taking it quite well. In fact she was described as being in good spirits."

"She should be," Doctor Dart said, sniffing. "He'd been giving her a hard way to go for the last twenty or thirty years." He nodded. "The one thing you can say about his golf game is that he was always very good out of sand traps."

Edwards shook his head. "If they were deep traps he'd yell 'fore' and then throw the ball up with a handful of sand."

"The prosecutor is going to ask questions," Sheriff Barger said, more in explanation than worry. "Even if Judge Hinshaw was retired there's a possibility the prosecutor will want to call the grand jury." He

shook his head. "And multiple violations of the rules of golf wouldn't, more's the pity, be a defense to a murder charge if the prosecutor gets his back up."

"You leave that to me," Edwards said. "An accident is an accident. If the prosecutor starts wasting county money on something like this then I'm going to write a few editorials. And this is an election year."

"I'll talk to him also," the sheriff said. "Are we all agreed then? It was an accident? A tragic golfing accident?"

He had a chorus of nods. Even Jan, behind the bar, nodded.

"I suppose it would be unseemly to play back nine?" Rose said, his voice questioning. "I hate to lose the day. One can't count on days like this forever. Soon it'll be fall and then winter." He looked forlorn. "No golf."

"We could take a vote on it," Edwards said. "I'm for finishing the eighteen."

Rose nodded. Doctor Dart hesitated, then nodded also.

Sheriff Barger said. "To the tenth tee then." He watched them as they finished their drinks.

IT HAD GONE ABOUT AS HE EXPECTED IT. NOW ALL HE needed to make certain of was that he'd not bent or jammed the telescoping ball retriever when he used it to topple Judge Hinshaw from the bank to the sharp rocks below.

They'd wait a suitable time and then he and Ruth Hinshaw could begin to openly see each other. He'd told her for several years she deserved more than the now deceased judge. And the culminating insult, Hinshaw's death warrant, had come on the sixth hole when Barger had caught Hinshaw trompling the green where Barger's putt must travel for a rare birdie attempt. Barger had missed the putt. There was cheating and there was *cheating*.

Sheriff Barger smiled at Jan and paid her for the drinks.

"It just goes to show," she said. "Cheaters never win."

Barger took his golf cap piously off and shook his head. "Let's not speak ill of the dead."

She leaned toward him, her voice a whisper. "In a few months, when this dies down, I'm going to make a special drink for you gentlemen. We'll call it privately 'Hinshaw on the rocks'."

BOGIE QUIZ

1. Humphrey Bogart received an Academy Award for his role in:

- (a) THE MALTESE FALCON (b) CASABLANCA
⇒ (c) THE AFRICAN QUEEN (d) THE CAINE MUTINY
-

2. One of Bogart's most unusual roles was that of a vampire preying upon young girls for blood. What was the movie?

- (a) ALL THROUGH THE NIGHT (b) THE RETURN OF DOCTOR X
(c) DEAD END (d) THE BOGIE MAN
-

3. The first film that Bogie appeared in with his eighteen-year-old bride-to-be Lauren Bacall was:

- (a) THE BIG SLEEP (b) KEY LARGO
— (c) TO HAVE AND HAVE NOT (d) CASABLANCA
-

4. In what movie was Bogart an Army Intelligence operator who breaks up an enemy plot to blow up the Panama Canal?

- (a) CANAL ZONE (b) ACTION IN THE NORTH ATLANTIC
(c) WAR IS HELL (d) ACROSS THE PACIFIC
-

5. One of his first big breaks came when he played the role of Duke Mantee in a movie made from a play in which he also starred. The movie was:

- (a) THE ROARING TWENTIES (b) THE PETRIFIED FOREST
(c) THE KING AND I (d) HIGH SIERRA

6. In this one, he received his third Academy Award nomination for his portrayal of Captain Queeg.

(a) THE AFRICAN QUEEN

(b) ACROSS THE PACIFIC

(c) THE CAINE MUTINY

(d) MUTINY ON THE BOUNTY

7. In an offbeat melodrama written by John Huston and Truman Capote, Bogart portrayed a stranded adventurer who teams up with a curious group of conspirators to obtain an African uranium mine.

(a) AFRICA SCREAMS

(b) THE DARK CONTINENT

(c) BEAT THE DEVIL

(d) THE ROAD TO RICHES

8. In this action film he played a tank commander during World War II and held off a German battalion at a desert oasis.

(a) SAHARA

(b) THE DESERT FOX

(c) THE SANDS OF KALAHARI

(d) BLOOD AND SAND

9. In what film did Bogart portray the owner of a small fishing boat who becomes involved in smuggling a French underground leader and his wife out of Martinique?

(a) CASABLANCA

(b) KEY LARGO

(c) PASSAGE TO MARSEILLE

(d) TO HAVE AND HAVE NOT

10. Which of these roles did Bogart not play in films?

(a) Charlie Allnut

(b) Elwood P. Dowd

(c) Fred C. Dobbs

(d) Joe Gunn

ANSWERS

10-b

9-d

8-a

7-c

6-c

5-b

4-d

3-c

2-b

1-c

Stiff Competition

BOOK REVIEWS by JOHN BALL

Col. Clive Egleton retired from the British army to write espionage novels, a field in which he is obviously very comfortable. His latest, called *Troika*, takes a new angle, the incessant in-fighting between the Russian KGB and its alter ego, the GRU, or Red Army intelligence service. The scene shifts from remote regions in the Soviet Union to Moscow, London and New York. A lot of the apparatus technique is included, and the ways in which one Russian organization tries to dominate the other, even at the cost of killing each other's agents. The plot is involved, but somehow Egleton manages to keep it all clear in the reader's mind. There is also an unlikely touch of romance that involves a very intelligent American girl and a GRU agent. If espionage fiction appeals to you, you won't want to miss Egleton. (Atheneum, \$14.95)

★ ★ ★

The vast audience that Dame Agatha Christie left behind her will certainly be pleased with *Hercule Poirot's Casebook*, a large-sized volume of more than 850 pages that contains fifty stories about her famous Belgian detective. The publicity for the book refers to it as a

complete collection, but whether or not it contains all the short stories about M. Poirot is not quite clear. Several reference books on hand don't provide the necessary data to check this out. However, the Casebook is unquestionably a major collection, so far unique, and for Christie fans close to indispensable. Dodd Mead offers it at \$15.95 which, considering the contents, must be rated a notable bargain.

★ ★ ★

Jeffrey Ashford has a new book called *A Sense of Loyalty*. The title very nearly tells it all. A case of industrial espionage has been uncovered and private eye Inchman is engaged to find the leak that may cost a major motor manufacturer millions. Mike Sterling, chief of public relations, discovers who may be responsible, but because of family loyalties he fails to act and thereby nearly wrecks the future of his employer. The ending is consistent with Sterling's obstinate position, with the reader left wondering if his devoted loyalty was misplaced or not. (Walker and Co., \$12.95)

★ ★ ★

For some time E.V. Cunningham (Howard Fast) has been reporting the cases of Beverly Hills Nisei detective, Masao Masuto. The latest one is *The Case of the Murdered Mackenzie*, a work that upholds and enhances the reputation of this well-liked series. This time the Japanese-American detective takes up the case of a murder victim found in a bathtub. When it is determined that he is a brilliant engineer and husband of a former movie queen, and a strong motive surfaces, the lady becomes a prime suspect. But when she too is done in, the brilliant Masuto must exert all his powers to uncover the killer. A very good job which will certainly please Cunningham's many fans. (Delacorte, \$11.95)

★ ★ ★

Three of P.D. James' much admired crime novels have been put together in a single volume called *Trilogy of Death*. The titles are *Death of an Expert Witness*, *Innocent Blood*, and *The Skull Beneath the Skin*. Scribner's offers the package at \$19.95, which is about half of what the books would cost individually.

★ ★ ★

Another triple volume is *Banking on Murder*, which contains three of Emma Lathen's works about bank advisor John Putnam Thatcher

(what a well-chosen name that is). The novels in this one volume are *Death Shall Overcome*, *Murder Against the Grain*, and *A Stitch in Time*. Mr. Thatcher never disappoints the reader; his author(s) are far too expert for that. The large volume sells for \$17.95, an even better buy.

★ ★ ★

Some of the finest Sherlockian literature long out of print is being brought back in fine, hard-cover volumes by Magico Magazine, an unlikely, but most welcome publisher. The latest addition is *The Illustrious Clients' Case-book*, which contains both volumes originally produced by the Indianapolis scion society of the Baker Street Irregulars. There are also a number of other new items available; for details and prices write to Magico Magazine, Box 156, New York, NY 10002.

★ ★ ★

James Bond fans will have a field day with the new and very well done *James Bond Bedside Companion* by Raymond Benson. This is a comprehensive work in large format, a "coffee table" book devoted to many aspects of Ian Fleming, his creation James Bond, the novels, the films, and more. There are detailed analyses of each of the novels and films, with attention also being given to the Bond novels written since Fleming's death. The various actors who have portrayed Bond are discussed, as are the women who have surrounded him. Lastly, the whole is well illustrated. This last feature would have benefited from better paper or an improved printing process; some of the photographic reproductions are definitely muddy. This is the only flaw in an otherwise impressive volume. (Dodd Mead and Co. \$19.95 in hardback; \$12.95 in soft cover)

★ ★ ★

The literature is full of secret agents who work for an unnamed bureau that doesn't officially exist. Among them are Marcus Farrow and Charlie McGowan; they appear again in Angus Ross' new book *The Darlington Jaunt*. McGowan and Farrow break down doors without warrants, manhandle suspects in custody, and otherwise ignore the official rules of British justice while keeping up some of the briskest dialogue in the literature. Their new adventure moves at breakneck speed. It's a very good read, although the text is loaded with a plethora of typographical errors. (Walker and Co., \$12.95)

★ ★ ★

Every since *Psycho* appeared, Robert Bloch has been noted for his special talent with crime and horror. His latest book, *The Night of the Ripper*, definitely maintains his reputation. It's another treatment of Jack the Ripper with Mr. Bloch's own solution to the unsolved case. Much of the context is genuine Ripperiana, with some fictional additions. For an unstated reason most chapters begin with a non-relevant description of a particularly horrible torture inflicted in times past. Definitely not for children or those sensitive to such extreme forms of human suffering. (Doubleday, \$14.95)

★ ★ ★

PAPERBACK NOTES: William Morrow and Co. has started an auspicious new paperback reprint series called Quill Mystery Classics. Some of the selected titles include Fredric Brown's *The Deep End*, *The Killer Inside Me* by Jim Thompson, and two by Howard Browne under his John Evans by-line, *Halo in Blood*, and *Halo for Satan*, both featuring private eye Paul Pine. These volumes are \$3.50 each . . . The Foul Play Press offers two of Bill Pronzini's nameless detective books, *Blowback* and *Undercurrent* for \$3.95 each. Good San Francisco private eye stuff . . . Still another series is Pantheon International Crime offered by Pantheon (Random House). Included is the first paperback appearance of Peter Loveley's *Keystone*. The setting is the early days of Hollywood when Mack Sennett was in flower. Lots of fun for \$2.95 . . . Academy Chicago, a small but lively publisher, offers H.R.F. Keating's *Bat's Fly Up for Inspector Ghote*. The little Bombay policeman is in trouble again and you'll love every minute of it. \$4.95 . . . Norton offers Lady Antonia Frazer's *A Splash of Red*. Jemima Shore, who appeared in *Quiet as a Nun* is back, this time in a modern penthouse setting. \$3.95 . . . Avon has three originals worth noting. A small Nevada town's all country music radio station is the background for Jim R. Lane's *Static*, a good readable story. Next is *On Account of Murder* by Elizabeth Powers. A New York office setting and a Czech female detective are featured. Clare Barroll takes us to Hawaii with another female detective, reporter Jennifer Ames who is pretty, but determined. Prices vary . . . Bartholomew Gill's *McGarr and the P.M. of Belgrave Square* is very Irish, in plot, setting, and language. A heavy atmosphere drips from every page. Penguin offers it for \$3.50. ●

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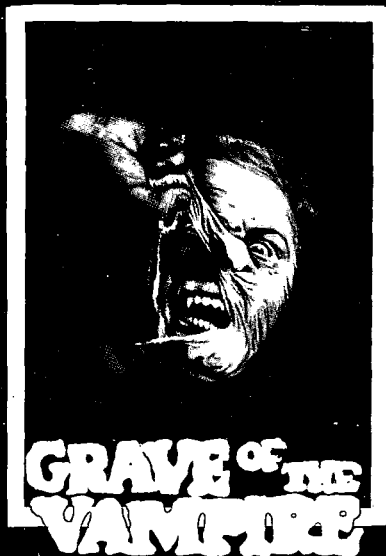
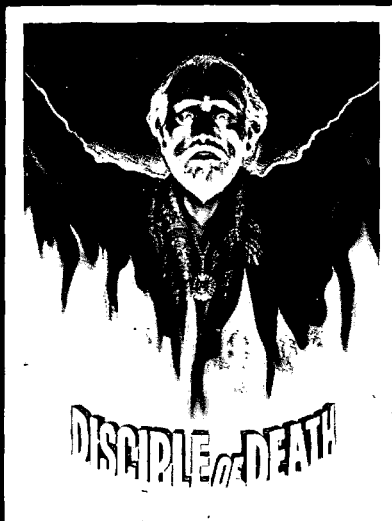
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